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ADVENTURE

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Adventure

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Issue of January 15

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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Do you remember

A Night in San Asensio?

The Ship in

AS THE day advanced the heat had grown more oppressive. A white steam rose from the surface of the swamp. Though the dense foliage of the mangroves shut out the scorching rays of the sun, the shade brought no relief.

A crocodile slid down a steep slope and splashed into brown stagnant water that smelt of death. Some invisible animal blundered off at a gallop through the undergrowth. Monkeys chattered overhead. A snake wriggled its sinister length over a twisted mangrove root and vanished. Land crabs scuttled across the green mud.

Undeterred by the fever that racked him and the toil of the long march, Ashbrook trudged slowly through the swamp, peering right and left from under his wide sun helmet. His strength was failing him, he knew. Yet more than ever was he determined to struggle on. No dangers, no difficulties, neither mud nor mangroves, would stop him now.

He forced his way into a patch of tall reeds that formed an alley between the mangroves. His face smarted from the bites of the mosquitoes that rose in swarms at each step. His bare arms and knees were cut by thorns, his khaki shirt and shorts were torn. There was a tightness in his chest and a burning sensation in his parched throat. To haul one tired, aching leg after the other and keep moving demanded his utmost energy and will power and courage.

All at once he was aware that the boys were no longer following. He turned to see what had become of them.

The three natives had halted and stood talking together in the gloom of the mangroves.

Ashbrook called out sharply.

"MacConachie, it's getting late. Come on!"

But MacConachie, his gun boy and bearer, part Arab, part no one knew what quite—Malay perhaps, or Burmese—a wizened little man of uncertain age with a scarred, pockmarked face and lean muscular body, bare to the waist, shook his turbaned head.

Ashbrook sighed.

It was worse than he had thought. MacConachie, of all men! MacConachie, who had traveled across the sea and spoke English as well as Arabic and Swahili and half a dozen other dialects more or less

Here is
a New Story
BY W. TOWNEND

the Swamp

fluently, intelligibly at least—MacConachie was afraid!

"No come," said MacConachie sullenly.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Dead man, *bwana*, he walks!" said MacConachie.

He said something to the other boys that Ashbrook, knowing little Swahili, could not follow. They grunted and rolled their large bulbous eyes uneasily. Their black shining faces had lost color.

Neither argument nor coercion now would have the least effect. Twelve months in East Africa had taught Ashbrook that while the native might be humored or driven into overcoming his fears of wild animals, lions or elephants or snakes, or human foes from hostile tribes, no power on earth, not even death, would overcome his wild and unreasoning terror of the supernatural.

The three natives were determined to go no farther, he was positive. Nor was he surprized. All day long they had murmured against the expedition. Even MacConachie, as a rule dependable, had for once shown himself weak and, to an extent, obstructive. If he bullied them, or used threats, after the custom of so many white men, they would without warning drop their gear and bolt and leave him in the middle of this fetid swamp to find his way back to camp as best he could.

MacConachie rested on his rifle and scowled. He pressed his naked foot into the mud. Water oozed over his toes. From the expression in his face he seemed ashamed of himself, bewildered, yet stubborn.

"*Bwana,*" he said, "the s'ip!"

"The ship!" said Ashbrook. "Where?"

"Here!" said MacConachie. He raised a skinny arm and pointed toward the dark screen of mangroves ahead.

Ashbrook considered, then made up his mind.

"Wait here," he said. "All of you. Understand what I say, MacConachie?"

"'Es," said MacConachie. His tongue moistened his thick lips. "No good. Dead man, *bwana*, he walk!"

"Rubbish!" said Ashbrook.

He turned and once more began to walk slowly, laboriously, through the slimy, rancid mud under the mangroves in the direction to which MacConachie had pointed.

And then, quite suddenly, before he had covered thirty yards or forty, wading ankle deep in water, he saw the ship.

What MacConachie and the other natives had said was true. There was a ship, after all!

But was that ship the long-lost *Actium?*

Could it be that the six-year-old secret was to be revealed at last? It wasn't likely, he reflected. What real hope had he of finding the ship his dead brother had commanded here, in this African swamp?

And yet it was because of that hope, however slight, that he had made the journey.

The *Actium* had vanished from off the face of the seas, leaving no trace. There had been no gale recorded which might have sunk her. And had she been sunk by German gun-fire, surely word would have reached England!

What was more probable than that Jack had taken his ship over the sand bars at flood tide, up the river, away from the Indian Ocean and the *Königsberg* and *Emden*, still at large in the autumn of 1914?

Even so, the mystery remained a mystery.

Ashbrook crawled wearily over a cluster of mangrove roots, pulling aside the hanging lianas that impeded him, and then halted.

Never before in all his twenty crowded years of life had he seen so strange a sight as now met his eyes.

In front of him, full in the blaze of tropic sunlight, stern on, was a rusty steel steamer, heeling over to starboard, covered with green slime and vegetation, with one tall funnel from which all vestige of paint had long gone, two stumpy masts with broken wire rigging, and two bridges, upper and lower. Mangroves grew high up over the level of the bridge deck on either side. Only the top part of the rudder and one blade of the rusty propeller were visible above the mud of the swamp. The bow was higher than the stern. The cowled ventilators amidships and the main exhaust at the funnel, the engine-room casing and the wheel-house, all showed signs of heavy damage by shell-fire. The boats were missing. No sign of life was to be seen on board. The ship was abandoned.

It seemed incredible that any seagoing vessel should have reached so inaccessible a spot as this. Yet, here was the ship, derelict, out of her right element, fifteen long miles from the sea!

Presently Ashbrook advanced once more, his heart thumping unsteadily, and spelled out the raised letters, no longer white but rust-colored and difficult to decipher, on the stern. He read slowly, without understanding—

S. S. Actium. Liverpool.

By degrees the words took on their real significance.

S. S. Actium. Liverpool. The ship his eldest brother had commanded! The truth stunned him. He had found Jack's ship, the *Actium*, at last.

He moved away from the stern, around to the port side of the vessel, through the mangroves, keeping a sharp lookout for crocodiles submerged in the mud. Abaft the engine-room bulkhead, just above where he judged the Plimsoll line would be, he discovered a hole in the hull. A shell must have penetrated the thin steel plates here and burst, perhaps in the number four hold. Yet even after having been shelled the *Actium* must have escaped the cruiser.

The sense of mystery deepened.

He clambered along the limb of a mangrove and dropped on to the bridge deck and stood by the winch of the bunker hatch and, just as he had made his way through the swamp, peered warily left and right from under his helmet, afraid and yet assuring himself he was not afraid.

Seven years before when he had last set foot aboard the *Actium* he had been a boy of thirteen. He remembered having heard his brother say proudly that for a tramp she was none too bad. At the time she had been a new ship, fresh from the yards, finished with her steam trials but

not yet loaded with cargo for her maiden voyage. Everything had been spick and span—the white deck-houses and bridges, the boats, the green and black funnel, with the one red and two white bands and the firm's monogram, the buff-colored masts and derricks, the varnished teak-wood doors, the glistening brass work. Boylike, he had been impressed, more impressed than he had cared to say. His brother, sixteen years older than himself, had been presented in a new light as one of a race of beings infinitely superior to ordinary landsmen, the *Actium's* captain.

And now, wherever he looked, he saw rust and decay, slime and mud, the marks of shrapnel, the droppings of birds. And brooding over the whole ship, like some tangible presence, was the swamp, with its miasma and corruption, and the devouring mangroves.

Ashbrook loosened his revolver in its holster and advanced toward the port saloon alleyway and entered cautiously, not daring to think too much of what he might find hidden.

Bats fluttered wildly around his head, rats scurried squeaking away at his approach. The stench of wild animals combined with the suffocating heat of the alleyway sickened him.

For an instant the thought came to him, to be put aside immediately as unworthy, to turn and make his escape into what fresh air there was on deck. He glanced hurriedly into each of the small rooms leading out of the alleyway. No traces of their former occupants remained, save only a few pitiful photographs, mildewed and faded beyond recognition, still fastened on to the bulkheads, some books in the racks above the wash-stands and some damp and moldy bedding. In the mess-room and pantry were piles of broken crockery, rusty knives, tarnished spoons and forks, and lockers that had been gnawed by rats.

The saloon had all the appearance of having been gutted. The glass of three of the four ports looking out on to the forward deck was smashed. One of the swivel chairs lay on its side. Another had lost its back. Here, too, the smell was nauseating. The bats fluttered to and fro, as though resenting this intrusion into their home. There were flies everywhere. One of the teak-wood panels by the door that led to the starboard alleyway was splintered and scarred by bullet holes. On the carpet, which was caked with dried mud, were masses of faded papers that had once been soggy and were now dried to a kind of pulp, torn pages of books, charts, sailing directions, letters, with broken medicine and beer bottles, flock mattresses ripped and torn, sets of mildewed oilskins, feathers of dead birds. The big mahogany table was still covered by a faded cloth and on the cloth lay a book, open flat, with a pipe to keep the page.

Ashbrook was touched by a feeling of pity. The book, "Great Expectations," and the pipe had lain on the table ever since the day the reader, whoever he might have been, had been called on deck never to return.

As he moved about the room, brushing the swarms of flies from his face, he was startled by a deep and angry growling from under the settee. Not caring to investigate and perhaps have to shoot a wildcat with her kittens—the growls resembled a cat's—he turned and walked out of the saloon.

The rooms leading from the starboard alleyway the mate's—the second mate's, the bathroom and the spare berth—were like the rooms in the port alleyway in that they, too, were laid waste and devoid of any sign of human habitation.

And once, Ashbrook reflected, men had lived here—white men! Men whom perhaps, as a boy, he had met and spoken with. Men now dead. He shivered and passed out once more on to the deck and climbed the starboard-side ladder to the lower bridge where he saw in front of him a door on which was a brass plate, green with verdigris and marked *Captain*.

He turned the handle and entered his brother's sitting room and then stopped and stared curiously about him. Here, at least, there was no vestige of the pillage

and destruction and the ravages of wild animals that he had seen in the saloon and the rooms adjacent.

He wondered why. He reflected presently that while the doors of the saloon alleyways had been open when the crew had abandoned their ship, the doors of this room must have been closed.

He realized then that since his brother had gone no other human being had stood where he stood. No other eyes had seen what his saw. The thought filled him with an overpowering sense of his dead brother's nearness. In 1914 one brother went out, the door was shut. Six years later the door was opened and another brother entered.

After a time he began to study the contents of the room with an absorbed interest.

On the flat-topped writing desk were some dusty papers, yellow and stained, a tray of pens, a brass ink-pot, in which was some powdered ink, a blotter. The glass of the bookcase was unbroken, the books were still on their shelves. On the settee were some clothes, neatly enough folded but thick with dried mud, and a dozen or so blue-backed charts, rolled. On the small table in the corner by the starboard door by which he had entered was a nautical almanac for the year 1914 and an old scrap log with a torn cover.

Ashbrook remembered that when he had last stood in this room, the walls were covered with pictures, family photographs, photographs, too, of ships and shipmates. But now they had gone. Could his brother have taken them with him, frames and all, when he went? How was it he had had time to think of photographs in what must have been a period of stress and danger!

He wondered then what his brother's feelings must have been when he had taken his last look at his room. He tried to visualize his departure. He could imagine all who survived of the *Actium's* crew taking to the boats and rowing away through the swamp. He could imagine them resting on their oars and looking back at their ship. He could imagine them, some of them, waving their hands in farewell. "Poor old *Actium!*" they would say, and some would feel sad and some would swear and some would ask why the —— didn't they make haste and get out of it!

Of one thing he was sure—not a single man of the *Actium's* crew had outlived that journey across the swamp.

He was about to open the door that led to the bedroom when his ears caught the sound of a faint shuffling on the lower bridge. He turned and listened intently, not frightened exactly but uneasy.

The shuffling became the sound of slow footsteps.

The thought flashed into his mind that MacConachie had overcome his fear of the ship and had come aboard.

That, he realized, was impossible.

The man creeping about the bridge deck wore shoes. MacConachie and the other boys were barefooted.

Ashbrook stared fixedly at the starboard doorway through which he had entered and the mass of green mangroves that grew above the rails and the blue sky beyond. He was conscious that some one was watching him through one of the ports that faced aft. He wheeled swiftly and saw nothing. Wild terror took hold of him. He was afraid of something that was not death exactly but was worse than death, much worse. He did not know what that something was. He only knew he was terrified. He was in a trap, and unless he could escape and escape quickly he was doomed.

And then the door on the port side of the lower bridge opened and he saw a shrunken, gray-bearded man in a tattered uniform with the tarnished gold bands on the sleeve that denoted the rank of captain.

Neither moved. They stared at each other in silence.

The man with the gray beard and the wizened, sunburned face had fierce, red-rimmed eyes and a thin, hooked nose and loose lips that showed yellow fangs. He wore on his head an old uniform cap with

a limp and battered peak. And in his right hand he held a revolver.

Before Ashbrook could force himself to speak the man fired. The shock of the explosion stunned Ashbrook. The bullet struck the wall close to his head. Feebly, very slowly, trembling all over, he tried to drag his own revolver from its holster.

But the man with the gray beard began to laugh.

"Ashbrook!" he said. "Why, it's Ashbrook, that's who it is!"

Ashbrook felt that of all impossible things that had ever befallen him this was the most impossible.

He spoke in a voice that he did not recognize as being his.

"Yes, I'm Ashbrook!"

The man with the gray beard and the fierce eyes lowered his revolver and said, as though talking to himself:

"Might ha' known it. But what in ——'s he wearin' that khaki for, eh? Silly o' me! Mustn't do that kind o' thing again, must I? Wastin' ammunition. Not that I ain't got a heap. No. But what's the use, eh? What's the use o' shootin' at nothin'?"

"No use at all!" said Ashbrook.

The man with the beard and the fierce, unpleasant eyes had been, he felt, as scared by the encounter as he was. He stood in the doorway, muttering to himself, his dark brown, wizened countenance twitching, his loose lips working queerly, as if chewing.

"I ought to ha' known shootin' would ha' done no good, Ashbrook! That's what's been troublin' me lately. Gettin' kinda queer in the head. Do you know what that comes from? It's because I'm all by myself—alone but for you! An' you're not much good to a feller, except to talk to, God knows! Yes, an' where's the comfort in talkin' to you? No comfort! Gettin' used to you now, Ashbrook, eh! You an' me, together aboard the ship! An' you not in uniform! I'm ashamed o' you!"

He began to laugh feebly in a high pitched way that made Ashbrook shiver.

"He-he-he! You an' me, together, aboard the ol' *Actium!* Bloody ol' *Actium!* Layin' here at her moorin's, ready to put to sea when I give the word! —— ol' *Actium*, an' you an' me aboard of her!"

He put the revolver down on to the settee next the rolled charts and thrust his hands into the pockets of his ragged jacket and whistled tunelessly to himself. Then he walked to the flat-topped desk and turned over some of the faded papers, still whistling.

Ashbrook had an uneasy feeling that he was acting a part, pretending to be unaware of his presence in the room with him.

Suddenly the man with the beard turned and glared at him with his red-rimmed eyes narrowed into two slits of hate under the fierce eyebrows.

"Still here, eh! Thought you'd ha' gone. In need o' company, too, eh? All right, Ashbrook—stay where you are. I'm used to you. I got to be used to you. —— an' blast you!" He lowered his voice. "You mind this, feller! I'm captain. You're nothin'. Mate, if you like, but not captain! No, not captain. I'm captain, understand! An' nothin' you can do, Ashbrook, can mend it!"

Ashbrook watching him closely felt that the evil of the swamp was concentrated in this one man's being. He was evil, capable of any cruelty. In his fierce eyes he could read lust and treachery and hate. His mouth was the mouth of a fool, a fool whose pleasure was to be vile and cause pain to others.

"Queer, ain't it?" he said.

He leaned listlessly against the flat-topped desk, his hands once more in his pockets, his cap on the back of his narrow head, and stared vacantly at the wall opposite.

"Both of us aboard the same ship, the two survivors of the *Actium* an' one of 'em dead! That takes some swallowin', don't it? You an' me, eh! I'm alive, Ashbrook, you're the dead one, but you're more alive than me, I know! You couldn't help but be! I hated you an' you're with me! That's my everlastin' punishment. With

me, here, all the time, night an' day, asleep, awake, you an' me, inseparables! That's the terrifyin' part of it! The hell of it!" He whimpered and put his hands to his face. "All these long months! Months an' months an' months! I don't know how long! Months an' months! Ashbrook, tell me, how long is it since you died?"

He looked at Ashbrook over the tips of his fingers that rested on his face. And at last Ashbrook understood. The heat and the fever had made him stupid or he would have known sooner than this that the madman with the cruel eyes and the fool's mouth thought he saw not the Ashbrook who planted cotton and was alive, but the Ashbrook who had commanded the *Actium* and was dead.

Was he—he wondered—so much like his brother as all that?

"Who do you think I am?" he said thickly.

The man with the beard had, apparently, not heard his question. He went on talking hurriedly in his harsh, mumbling voice:

"I hated you always. You know I hated you. Always you done your best to keep me down—to thwart me. You were younger than me, Ashbrook, two an' twenty years younger, an' yet senior! You ain't surprized I hate you, are you?" He dropped his hands and took a step nearer Ashbrook away from the flat-topped desk and thrust his face to within six inches of his face. Ashbrook stood his ground and did not budge. "I hated you because you had what I hadn't. You stood between me an' prosperity. You was in favor with the owners, I wasn't. You, you sanctimonious 'umbug, you put yourself in my place. I was passed over—at my age—with all my years of experience countin' for nothin'. You thought you'd got the better o' me, didn't you, you hypocrite, but I had you in the end, Ashbrook, in spite o' your airs! I had you! Poor old Bob Coombes, he had you!"

"You had me!" said Ashbrook slowly. "How!"

"How!" The man who called himself Coombes began to laugh, rocking to and fro and hugging himself with his arms. "How! You ask me that, Ashbrook! You're dead, ain't you! I'm in command! You told me, blast you for a pukin' liar! you told me that night, comin' down from Port Sudan, —— you! you'd no hope of me gettin' command, ever! Because o' the whisky! The whisky! ——, you make me sick, talkin' pious like a missionary! You did. God's truth, you talked pious like a missionary! Because o' the whisky, you said! Well, Jack, I showed you you were wrong, didn't I? I never was a gentleman, was I? No, never!"

Again he laughed, again he hugged himself and rocked to and fro, Then, all of a sudden becoming serious, he seated himself on the flat-topped desk.

"An' now I'm captain o' my own ship, with no one on earth, no one, Ashbrook, no owners, nothin' to stop me doin' as I —— well please! Supplies enough! Grub! Tinned grub! A whole cargo o' grub! An' what I can kill ashore. Tobacco an' tea! Tons of it! No whisky, though! No, that don't do! Against orders! My orders! I'm in command, see! Poor old Bob Coombes what you laughed at an' scorned an' kept from gettin' a ship! In command, Jack Ashbrook, instead o' you!"

"But why?" said Ashbrook. "Why?"

"Why! Be sensible, Ashbrook! Who else could be in command but me!"

"When did you take over the ship?"

"When did I take over the ship? ——! what a question to ask! I took over the ship the day you went out! An' you know it, you —— dead hypocrite! I'm Captain Coombes I am, alive an' commandin' the *Actium*, an' you—you're dead! Ah, that's the rum part of it! An' all because o' that —— German shellin' us an' drivin' us inland up the river! That, an' the bit o' the dynamo the chief engineer fixed inside my —— head, clickin' away like mad!" His lips lifted away from the yellow fangs and he snarled like an old and angry terrier. "But he got his, the chief did, sure enough! Same

as you, you —— dead hypocrite with your cantin' talk of how good you was! The pair o' you!"

He chuckled and shook his head vigorously.

"You had your suspicions, o' course, an' I don't blame you. No, I don't. You were right, blast you! Remember the night we got here, after that run up the river in the dark, through the swamps, over the sand bars! Gor', what a night! The hands didn't like it, they didn't. I told 'em, I did, the ol' man didn't know where we was at. It was true, too. None of us did. I had my plans, o' course. Cut an' dried, I had 'em. What could any one do against me? I wanted command. I was goin' to have it. Why in —— should I be passed over for a boy two an' twenty years younger than me? It wasn't fair, it wasn't right! By Gor' it wasn't! I wouldn't stand it, I wouldn't! My chance had come soon as that —— German drove us up the river, an' I meant to take it! Ah! an' I did take it! An' why not? Didn't I have to?"

Ashbrook, seated now on the settee, Coombes' revolver by his side, wondered what would be revealed to him if he listened and said nothing.

Coombes talked on, to all appearance quite unmindful of his presence. He twisted his head from side to side, as his wicked little eyes glanced from one open doorway with its wall of mangroves and glimpse of brazen sky to the other, his wizened face twitching, his dirty, gnarled hands opening and shutting foolishly or reaching and clawing at his gray untidy beard, first one hand then the other, as if movement of some kind was essential and to remain perfectly still even for one instant was impossible.

The extraordinary part of it all was he needed no further encouragement to talk; those few questions had been enough to make him disclose all the secrets he must have guarded for so long. And yet, Ashbrook reflected, why should he be surprized? Coombes talked to him, the brother of his dead captain, as he must have talked to himself, for the sake of hearing his own voice and for no other reason at all.

"The senior mate in the company passed over. They said I drank. The —— liars! Old Coombes is no good, they said. Old Coombes, he drinks. Old Coombes didn't drink. They lied. He told 'e m, he did, in the office. He wouldn't touch a drop, so long as he lived, he said, if they made him captain. They said they didn't believe it. They laughed, —— them! Old Coombes was lucky, they said, that they employed him even as mate. But old Coombes was speaking the truth. Not a drop o' liquor has passed his lips, not one solitary drop, since he took over the ship. One last blind that night an' then no more! Not after they went, the last of 'em! No!

"The chief was dead set on gettin' away from the ship. He was scared that the wound in his arm was septic. It was, too. It was that an' the fever. He wanted a doctor. Gor', he wanted a a doctor bad! He was scared. Did any one offer to go with him? Did any one offer! They all offered, or most of 'em! An' who'd be navigator? Who'd take the boat through the swamp, down the river, to where there'd be a doctor, German or Portugee, it didn't matter a —— which, so long as he helped the chief! Why, ol' Coombes, o' course! Who else? Get rid of ol' Coombes! Ah! Get him away from the hip where he'd be in the way! There was eleven all told put off in the Number One lifeboat, the only boat that hadn't been shelled to bits, an' there ain't one of 'em livin' now but ol' Bob Coombes as is talkin'.

"The chief, he said, couple of hours after the boat had left the ship, 'Mr. Coombes, do you think it's possible we can get through or not?' The heat was just about killin' him. 'Aye,' said ol' Coombes, 'it's possible!' Possible! Aye. It was. For a man as could use his head. Aye. 'For God's sake, let's tie up under the shade of a tree!' said the chief. Ol' Coombes was agreeable. Why not? It suited him fine.

"While they was half-asleep he took

the compass to help find his way back to the ship an' he climbed ashore. But he wasn't in no particular hurry. He sat in a tree where they couldn't see him an' watched. They were scared an' tried to row back to the ship. The —— ignorant fools! The river was runnin' fast an' strong, it was: fast an' strong: with a rip like the Severn bore. An' what happened? Ah, that's what ol' Coombes knows an' nobody else! One thing, he didn't have no occasion to use his gun, same as he'd planned. He'd ammunition enough an' to spare. He didn't have no occasion to shoot, he didn't. An' why didn't poor old Coombes shoot, eh? Why, because the lifeboat run on a snag that knocked a hole in her planks an' sunk her, before his eyes! Aye, there they were, the ten of 'em, settin' waist deep in the water, the sun beatin' down on 'em, an' the river tearin' past an' ol' Coombes yellin'! That done for 'em— all the ten of 'em! There wasn't one of 'em got out o' that there river alive! An' why not? I laughed an' I laughed! I laughed till I —— near burst a blood-vessel, I did—I laughed till I —— near killed myself laughin'. God, how I laughed! I'm laughin' now when I think on it!"

Ashbrook checked the nausea that swept over him and spoke quietly in what he hoped was an ordinary, normal tone of voice—

"Crocodiles!"

"Crocodiles!" said Coombes with a gasp. "Crocodiles! Great big tearin', snappin', bitin' crocodiles! Friends o' mine! Friends o' mine! They got them ten —— stinkin' murderers. They got the chief engineer, him what put the clickin', racin' dynamo into me head to kill me!

"It was night, dark night an' hot as ——, when ol' Coombes got back to the ship. He said he'd put the boat on the right track an' they were goin' to fetch help, but he couldn't abear not to be with his captain! Clever, wasn't it! Gor', yes! Clever as ——!"

He began to speak of himself in the first person again:

"I bided my time in patience. I had to. What had become of the chief an' the others? God in Heaven, what had become of the poor chief? That's what you kept askin', Ashbrook! You an' the others! I wanted to know, too. Where was the poor ol' chief? I said. Ah, that was the problem, wasn't it?

"There was twenty-nine mortal souls aboard when we left Liverpool. There was ten killed by the Germans. There was ten drowned with the chief in the lifeboat. That made twenty. There was you an' me. Twenty-two. Seven was left. I bided my time. Three days went by. D'you remember them three days, Jack? I laugh now when I think on 'em— you, in command, me, bidin' my time! D'you remember the five that kept sayin' they wanted to go? The heat was eatin' 'em up. They couldn't live if they stayed where they was. Poor, —— ignorant fools! They couldn't live if they went the same way as the chief! I told 'em, with not a smile on my face, I'd take 'em. You wasn't to know. We slipped away from the ship that night. Dark it was an' hot. We went into the swamp we did, on foot, the six of us. But it wasn't the six of us come back! No, it wasn't the six of us!"

Ashbrook leaned forward. In five minutes, perhaps, or ten, he would know what he wanted to know.

"Did you kill them?" he asked.

"You heard the shootin', didn't you? You heard the shootin', an' you know I killed 'em. An' why? To put 'em out o' their misery! All five of 'em! There was Page an' Roberts that went first. Gor'! I laugh when I think of it! The others, they thought the Germans was on us! The Germans! Gor'! There wasn't a German within a hundred miles, there wasn't! It was me killed 'em! Me! 'I,' said the sparrer, 'with my bow an' arrer!' All in the dark. Page an' Roberts, first; then little Shaw, the fourth engineer; MacReady, the donkeyman; then Keggs. I never did like Keggs. A mean man. He fought. Ah, didn't he just? It was him you heard screamin'. I got him. He screamed like a woman, he did!

"But you never knew I was gone till you see me climbin' aboard, did you? But you heard the shootin'. You knew what it meant. Ah, an' you let me see what you knew! That settled it. You or me, Jack, wasn't it? If I wanted command, I had to get rid o' you!"

"Yes," said Ashbrook quietly. "You had to get rid of me!" His fingers clenched the butt of his revolver. "Tell me, Coombes—you had to get rid of me!"

Coombes threw back his head and laughed.

"I said by unanimous vote of the crew —that was my joke, wasn't it!—by unanimous vote of the crew—Williams, the steward, an' Lawson, the fireman, was all that was left an' they was drunk, or they wouldn't ha' been aboard! By unanimous vote of a drunken, speechless, 'elpless crew, I'd been elected captain! An' you laughed at me! You laughed once too often. I asked you, as man to man, all fair an' hearty, could I be captain! You laughed. You was captain, you said, so long as there was a breath o' life left in you! Fair an' hearty. I took you at your word, Ashbrook! I did! A breath o' life! The best joke I'd heard in a twelvemonth!"

He wagged his head in silent mirth and wiped his streaming eyes with his coat sleeve.

"I roused up the steward an' Lawson an' told 'em, straight, I was captain an' they'd have to obey orders. They laughed at me, the —— cutthroats! 'Mutiny!' I said. 'I'll show you!' I did show 'em. They wasn't armed, neither the one nor the other, an' they thought they could scare me! I showed they was wrong. I'm no weak-kneed coward when it comes to dealin' with scum like them. I drove 'em over the side, I did, an' shot them same as I'd shoot a snake, an' I watched 'em, I did, side by side in the water, the pair of 'em, till the crocs took 'em! Good ol' crocs!"

Ashbrook suppressed a sudden impulse to shoot. Mad or not, this red-eyed, gray-bearded little fiend was vermin.

"An' then, Ashbrook, then, I was the happiest man alive! I had the ship! I was captain!"

"That's a lie, Coombes, I was captain! I'm captain now!"

"You! What are you talkin' so daft for! How can you be captain, when I'm captain?"

"All the same, Coombes, I'm captain! Why not?"

Coombes was trembling. Under the tropic tan his face had lost some of its color.

"Ashbrook, you're no good. You couldn't stand up against me when I'd made up my mind. You tried an' you failed. You sit there, you —— ghost, tryin' to frighten me, night after night, an' you can't! We sit an' talk, the two of us, an' what's the good? I'm captain of the *Actium*. You, you're no more than a poor dead ghost that can't do nothin'. An' now, you'd better go. It ain't fair you bein' here by daylight. Night-time's your watch on deck, an' —— well you know it. You go, d'yer hear me!"

He rose to his feet shakily, took a few steps toward the starboard side door and halted.

"Queer! Why don't he go? Why don't he? He's got no right to be here, he ain't! Ain't I captain? I am. Then what's he want?" He glanced back over his shoulder at Ashbrook who had not yet moved from where he sat. "He's not playin' no tricks on me, is he? He can't! He's where I left him, ain't he? Then why don't he do as I say! I don't understand."

He stood frowning at Ashbrook, then turned and walked out of the doorway and began to climb the ladder that led to the upper bridge.

Ashbrook sprang to his feet and followed quickly, pausing long enough on the lower bridge to toss Coombes' revolver over the rail into the mangroves.

Coombes flung open the door of the chart-room abaft the wheel-house and stood craning his neck forward and peering across the threshold, as though too frightened to enter.

"Yes," he said, "he's there all right!

Kind o' scared me a minute or so. Thought he was gone. Didn't like it!"

He stepped away from the doorway and stood with his back to the rail, his arms folded across his chest.

Ashbrook advanced. For a moment it was difficult to see as the interior of the chart-room was dark by contrast with the blinding glare of the sun. And then, feeling sick with horror, he made out on the settee the outline of a man's figure under a dirty blanket and knew that his search was at an end.

Helmet in hand, he moved slowly into the chart-room. His limbs seemed suddenly to have lost their strength. He was weak and listless, unable to think. His heart beats shook him; the heat stifled him and choked his lungs and made breathing an effort.

Timidly, nerving himself for the ordeal, he lifted a corner of the blanket on which were dark brown blood stains and gazed at the mummied face of his brother, killed six long years before.

His eyes were dim.

"Poor old Jack!" he said. "He got you, didn't he!"

The silence was broken by the voice of the murderer.

"He's in there all right, ain't he! What's worryin' me, then? I killed him, didn't I? All right, then, what's worryin' me?"

Ashbrook let the blanket fall very gently and turned toward the doorway and Coombes leaning against the rail, grinning wickedly.

"Coombes," he said, "I want to speak to you!"

Coombes backed toward the head of the ladder that led to the lower bridge.

"Now, Ashbrook," he said, "you stay where you belong! No bullyin', mind! I'm not the man to be scared by a dead stiff like you! You can't do nothin' to me, you can't! I'm alive an' you, you're dead! Same as I seen with my own eyes. Dead! With a bullet slap through your black heart you are! You lea' me alone! Get back to your kennel, you dog!"

His little eyes expressed the first faint signs of knowing that all was not as it ought to be.

"Coombes," said Ashbrook, "you're a murderer! —— you, stand still!"

Coombes was descending the ladder.

"Stand still, you! Coombes, do you hear what I say!"

"What's he talkin' so rough for!" said Coombes uneasily. "That ain't like Jack Ashbrook, it ain't. Ol' Johnny never spoke like that! Rough, he is. Sounds like I dunno what! He's dead, ain't he! All right, what's he talkin' like that for, to poor ol' Bob Coombes? What's it mean? —— if I know!"

He reached the lower bridge and hesitated. He glanced quickly toward the door of his room and then at the ladder that led to the bridge deck. He shivered and muttered:

"Why don't he lea' me alone! Why don't he go! What harm have I done him! God A'mighty, why don't he go!"

Ashbrook slid down the last half dozen steps of the ladder and grabbed him tight by the arms.

"I've had enough of it! You think I've not seen through you an' your games!" He shook him savagely. "Stop acting, you —— murderer!"

Nothing that had befallen him since he had boarded the *Actium* prepared him for what followed next.

Coombes opened his mouth and began to screech at the top of his voice. Blind terror had seized him. He stopped screeching and fought with a strength that seemed scarcely credible in one so old and broken and decrepit looking.

Ashbrook, nearly forty years his junior, thrown off his balance, lost his grip on his right arm.

Coombes struck him with his clenched fist in the face again and again, drawing blood.

"You're alive, you —— liar! Alive, —— you! You're not dead, you liar! Alive, by Gor'! Alive!"

Ashbrook grabbed at his wrist and held him once more.

"Stand still, blast you! Stop it this

instant, or I'll make it worse than it's going to be!"

Coombes collapsed. His knees bent and he sank to the broken, shrapnel-splintered planking at the head of the ladder.

"God! He touched me!" His head sagged forward so that it was impossible to see his face, but his shrunken frame trembled and his voice was hoarse and strangled. "He touched me! God A'mighty! I killed him an' he's dead. I killed him, but he isn't dead, he's here, alive, an' holdin' me!" No longer struggling, he groveled before Ashbrook who let go of his hands in sudden loathing.

Whether he was mad or not, this degenerate in the faded uniform with the tarnished gold bands on his sleeves had been sane once. Sane enough to plot against his brother and plan his murder.

He felt no pity toward him. Directly or indirectly, Coombes had been responsible for the deaths of eighteen shipmates. He was proud of what he had done. The long years of loneliness aboard the *Actium* had brought him neither despair nor remorse. He had regarded himself as captain and been happy!

"Get up!" said Ashbrook harshly.

Coombes raised his head and straightened his frail body. A look of cunning crept into the red-rimmed eyes.

"I killed him once," he said. "I could kill him again! I know I could!"

"Get out of my sight!" said Ashbrook. "God! you make me sick!"

Coombes scrambled down the ladder on to the bridge deck and stood on the rusty plates gazing up at him, his wizened, sunburned face contorted by hate and fear.

"Then I ain't captain," he mumbled. He lowered his eyes and cringed as though he expected to be attacked. "I ain't captain, after all! No, that —— up there, he's done you in, he has! Poor ol' Bob Coombes, you ain't been captain after all! He's done you in, he has! Come to life again, after bein' dead! I didn't trust him ever, I didn't!"

He turned, whimpering like a beaten cur, climbed over the rail and dropped.

Ashbrook heard him plunging through the swamp.

He leaned over the starboard wing of the lower bridge and stared down at the green mass of the mangroves about the ship.

And suddenly he was contrite. Coombes was mad, of course. He shouldn't have driven him away. He shouldn't have let him think he was the man he killed. It wasn't fair. Where was the creature to go?

"Coombes!" he shouted. "Come back!"

He could still hear him in the swamp.

"Coombes!"

And then he thought, why worry? Hadn't Coombes killed his brother, murdered him in cold blood, and seventeen other men besides? Why pity a fiend like that?

His common sense assured him that Coombes would come to no real harm. No man could have lived in that swamp for six years without having learned by experience how to fend for himself.

Nevertheless, Coombes was a murderer. He should have taken charge of him and brought him to camp, a prisoner, so that the authorities could deal with him.

He descended the ladder to the bridge deck and clambered ashore through the branches of a mangrove.

"Coombes!" he shouted. "Coombes!"

There was no reply.

Ashbrook hurried in the direction he judged Coombes had taken.

"Coombes," he called, "where are you?"

He halted presently, uncertain which way to go, awed by the sense of being alone, with Coombes perhaps spying on him from the undergrowth. He listened intently but heard nothing. In all the swamp there seemed neither life nor movement. The thought came to him as he waited that the mangroves that pressed all about him were waiting, too. The silence became unendurable. The heat beat down on his bare head in waves.

And then, suddenly, he heard the crack of a rifle fired close at hand and a wild unearthly scream and the thud of a body falling heavily.

The spell that bound him was broken.

He fought his way through a thicket; lianas tripped him, thorns held him back; the thick growth of the mangroves barred his path. He struggled up a sloping bank of slime and in a little clearing among the mangroves found Coombes, lying dead, a bullet-hole in his forehead.

Some one was moving cautiously toward him.

He turned quickly and saw MacConachie approaching, rifle in hand, terror in his staring, bulging eyes. At a distance the two other boys followed.

"MacConachie," said Ashbrook sharply, "was it you who fired?"

MacConachie trembled.

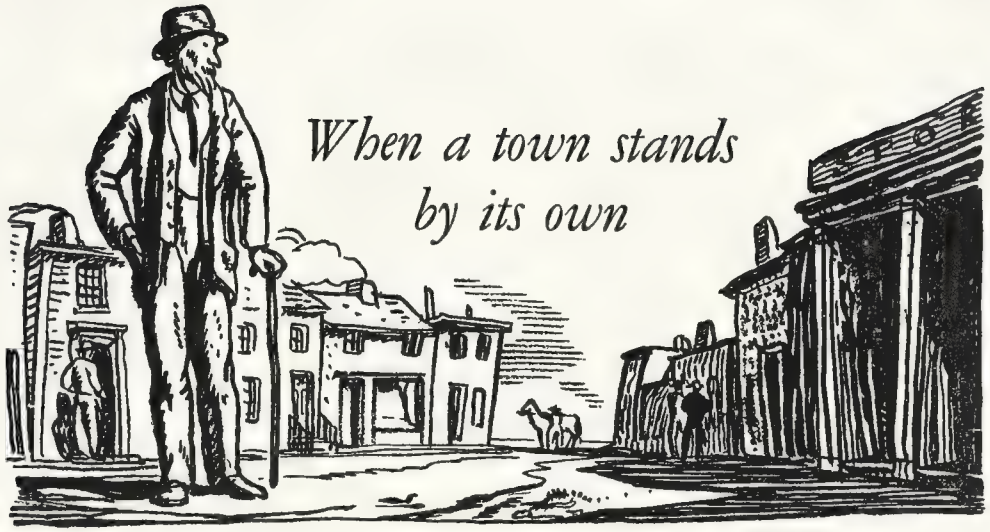
"Dead man, *bwana!* Dead man, *bwana,* he no walk!"

"Not now," said Ashbrook. "No."

He stared down at the corpse in its tattered, mud-stained uniform. The man's red-rimmed eyes were wide open and his yellow fangs showed in a wide grin from between his loose lips. It seemed to Ashbrook, then, that his brother's murderer was even now asserting, silently but persistently, that he, and no other, was the captain of the *Actium.*

"MacConachie," he said, "you'll have to get a grave dug. Understand what I say! A grave." He reflected. "Two graves," he said. "One here, MacConachie—one somewhere else!"

It was fitting, he thought, that the captains of the *Actium* should lie as far apart from each other as possible.



DONALD HOUGH'S

Marshal Pop Carver

WHEN tourists from the East, after skirting the northern rim of the great desert that reaches across most of Arizona and following a more or less alkali trail among the terraced cliffs and pink cañons of southern Utah, arrived with panting cars at Cedar Gulch and began to look around for local color, nobody ever pointed out old Pop Carver as the sheriff.

It was rather pathetic, the way those dudes couldn't forget the West as a wild slam-bang sort of place, replete with Mexican spurs and six-guns and magnificent sheriffs and maidens in distress. Of course there were always two or three cowboys from the old Bar Z outfit around town—ancient, desert-ravaged cowboys whose jaded cayuses jogged interminably. They had been left behind to nurse the maverick remnants of the once mighty Bar Z herd when the main outfit went down to old Mexico to escape the intolerable encroachment of small ranchers, scrub stock, sheep and fences. The Bar Z had taken with them everything that looked as if it could stand the journey, and some unkind souls intimated that the same test had been applied to the cowhands.

But the dudes always looked at these personifications of the Wild West in intense wonder and delight, and the merchants had a sort of an unwritten agreement with the foreman to let a few of the boys hang around the town during the tourist season.

But as for exhibiting Pop Carver as the sheriff, that would never do. The merchants and the garage man always jerked a cautious thumb toward the most ferocious looking of the senile and perfectly harmless Bar Z boys when the sightseers asked for the sheriff.

Pop Carver wasn't the sheriff, anyway. He was the marshal. And he had been the marshal for fifteen—or was it twenty? —years. Pop was a satisfactory marshal, under the circumstances, but he didn't dress up to his job. He wore a blue serge coat and blue serge pants and both were extraordinarily shiny and inclined to bagginess. Some of the older residents claimed that they were the originals of Pop's Civil War uniform.

Pop was a veteran of the war, and when he moved slowly along the board or baked clay sidewalks of Cedar Gulch with the aid of his antediluvian cane it was perfectly evident that he had been among the first to enlist. He still had his honorable discharge in the bottom of the brass-spangled trunk in the little white house—the little house at the end of the street that looked as if it had been scrubbed every day, and stood there, covered with vines and surrounded by the only flowers in Cedar Gulch, for all the world like a New England memory. That was where Pop and Ma Carver lived.

And Pop still would go up in the air and pound his cane on the boards and growl incoherently every time Dick Judd asked him how his heel was getting along, just as he had fifteen—or was it twenty?—years ago.

"My heel?" he'd ask, frowning heavily. "What are you talking about, Dick? Why do you ask me about my *heel?*"

"Why," Dick would say, with an earnest and puzzled expression on his face, "isn't that where you got wounded in the war?"

Then old Pop would explode.

"Why, —— your soul, Dick! You know better than that! My *heel!* By ——, I was wounded in the left shoulder! How many times do I have to tell you that? *Heel!* Hm!"

And the marshal would pound along up the sidewalk.

The reason that Pop Carver was marshal of Cedar Gulch was, plainly, that Cedar Gulch didn't need a marshal at all. Those days had passed long years ago in Cedar Gulch. No longer did great dust clouds rise from the sage-brush during the round-up; no more did the rollicking cowhands burst into the town with spirits unquenched by desert travail. The big herds had gone, the truth had been learned about the gold back in the hills, the modern mail stages that came from the end of the railroad a hundred miles to the north carried picture magazines and candy wrapped in tinfoil. So Cedar Gulch, with a brick drug store and a brick garage, dozed happily in the sun while the little irrigation creeks murmured monotonously along its streets to water the roots of the sweet locust trees that had found time to grow now that the excitement was over.

Once in a while, of course, there was something for the marshal to do. But that problem always had been easily solved. When something went wrong in that part of southern Utah over which the authority of Cedar Gulch by general consent extended, some of the boys went out and did the heavy work, and when the wrong-doers were safely in the hardware store's little rear room which was known as the jail somebody would hurry after Pop, explaining that the whole thing had happened so suddenly that there hadn't been time to tell him, and would he now please go over to the jail and see that everything was all right?

In a few minutes the tap of Pop's cane would reverberate along the street, and even Dick's cheerful question about the heel would bring no response. With all his might and main he'd thump his way over to the jail. When he was within earshot he'd begin to call out:

"Where is he? Have you got the rascal? Just hold him until I get there!"

And he'd puff into the place and look around with fire in his eyes; then he'd spy the captive—who'd be smoking a cigaret and chatting with the boys—and he'd shake his cane in awful menace.

"You can't monkey with the law in this part of the country!" he'd shout. And turning to the captors, "Better rope him, boys—he looks desperate!"

He was always sorry he didn't get there

in time and the boys were always sorry they hadn't had time to call him. And of course it goes without saying that now and then when something of minor importance did happen in the town, such as the fracas between the Bar Z boys and the foreigner who had the gambling concession at the rodeo a few years back, Pop was extraordinarily canny about emerging from his house. He could time things to a split second so he'd arrive at the scene just in time to give directions for the disposition of affairs.

NEWS was scarce in town when October came, for the last toursit had gone through and the citizens of Cedar Gulch were thrown back on their own resources for amusement and general excitement. Therefore when it became known that several million feet of timber back in the breaks of Karab Cañon was to be cut that winter a topic for endless conversation was furnished. This was to be the first timber ever cut in that country. It always had been a cow country, pure and simple, and the timber back in the hills never had been considered as anything other than scenery and a good protection against erosion. Even the great stand of yellow pine in Karab had never been thought of in terms of lumber.

But up in the north the forests had been falling with painful regularity. Most of the western timber had been corralled in new National forests. Consequently the Karab pine suddenly took on the glint of gold, and the owners had decided to operate.

As a general rule any new activity in the vicinity of Cedar Gulch was hailed with interest, for it meant a new crop of jobs, but this time that phase of it bothered no one, for lumbering was a different sort of business and it was early rumored that real lumberjacks from northern Minnesota and Canada were coming down for the job.

Although Cedar Gulch was close to the edge of the desert and its streets baked hard as bricks under the summer sun, still it lay at a fair altitude and snow came often in winter; in the pine-clad hills that rose behind it the snow piled four feet deep. It was evident then that this timber-cutting business was an under taking for specialists.

Jim Bradley had taken the contract. Bradley was a large, hearty, good-natured individual who had been a power in and around Cedar Gulch for many years. He had been magistrate, sheriff, mayor. In office or out, he had been a sort of general manager of the town and its affairs ever since most of the others could remember. It was inevitable that he should have a finger in this most surprizing pie of all. When he put up a rough board shack next to his general store folks began to feel that something new was in the wind; when the "office" sign was nailed over the door, the Bradley Timber Co. was born and the secret was out.

Late in October the mail stages that came over the mountains began to unload strange men in stranger clothes, and these reported at the office, where Bradley sat on a table and smoked his big cigar and rustled papers. From this metropolitan headquarters the newcomers were loaded into Bradley's big truck in detachments and shipped back to Karab Cañon. There, according to returning spies, the men were put to work building long, low, tarpaper-covered shacks, making skids, clearing roads and in other ways preparing for the harvest.

They were a funny creation, these lumberjacks from the north. They were big and rawboned and blond, and never a boot did they wear on their feet, but rubbers and heavy socks. And they cut off their woolen pants at the calves of their legs and their thick shirts hung loose over their belts. They wore ridiculous little hats, all battered out of shape. Taken as a whole, they were an odd lot, and quite a contrast to the trim, high-heeled, be-chapped cowboys with their sweeping, graceful hats.

They were a rough lot too, even though Cedar Gulch wouldn't admit it at first.

According to tradition, they all should have done the tenderfoot stag on the first day of their arrival. But the old days were quite over. These monstrous fellows with the big feet, coming down from a wilderness that was still a bit wild, captured the town immediately.

The Constitutional Amendment had hit Cedar Gulch and there wasn't so much as an honest saloon in which the lumberjacks might whoop things up. But living close to nature the lumberjacks had learned adaptability. Consequently they lacked the saloon only as a background.

Marshal Pop Carver, being as shrewd as he was old, saw no vacation ahead for the police powers of Cedar Gulch. Of course the big fellows from the north were back in Karab most of the time, but small contingents always were moving between the camps and the town. On Saturday evening or on Sunday they came down in force, usually in Jim Bradley's big truck. It was in the pool-hall that they first met the semi-retired cowpunchers from the Bar Z, and for a while they seemed to get along together in fine Christian fashion.

But the blond men from the north seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of the most potent kind of liquor, and soon minor quarrels between the bronc-riders and the log-riders began to crop out. As it was explained afterward, the cowhands made fun of the northerners because they couldn't ride a cayuse. All might have been well even then if big Lars Haugen, foreman of the Viking crew, hadn't been fool enough—in his cups—actually to mount Pete McCain's pinto: the one that was trained to buck at the rodeo.

The lumberman spoke vaguely of riding logs down dashing torrents, but there were neither logs nor torrents at hand and the lumberjacks were left foaming at the mouth.

That really started things, and the grand climax came one Sunday afternoon in early November. The lumberjacks had blood in their eyes. They paraded the street in a body, stopping off at the pool-hall on each counter-march; and the longer they paraded the louder grew their songs and the weaker their tread. Late in the day the ancient boys from the Bar Z came in and took up position in the pool-hall.

Among the more intensely interested spectators of this prelude to possibly disastrous conflict was Jim Bradley. For the first time in known history a frown crossed the otherwise serene brow of Jim Bradley. He walked nervously here and there; he put his hands in his pockets and took them out again.

Pop Carver, for the first time in history, was not taking his Sunday afternoon walk on the boards. This didn't especially matter, but Jim Bradley noticed it.

"That old rascal can smell trouble a mile away," he muttered.

But Bradley hesitated a moment too long. Some of the cowboys came out of the pool-hall just as the main body of lumberjacks came past. It all happened in a jiffy and it didn't amount to much either, except that one of the lumberjacks got badly spurred near the hip and black eyes bloomed among the cowhands with a startling spontaneity. It was all over when Bradley got there, and the outnumbered cowboys had retired to straighten out their lines.

The blood of the men from the north was roused, and although they summoned the remnants of their dignity when their boss confronted them, it would have been evident to the most inexperienced eye that they were beyond the point of honorable conduct.

So Bradley went over to get Pop. This wasn't playing the game fair, to get Pop before the thing was all settled, but the streets were almost deserted and Bradley knew that to strangers in the land the color of Pop's star would be an effective weapon.

"You'll have to go up there and arrest my men, Pop, before the town turns out and lynches them and I lose my contract," he explained. "You'll have to charge them with disturbing the peace and with assault and battery. I hate to

bother you this way, but these fellows don't know the customs of the country. I'll go ahead and try to round up a few of the boys."

Bradley hurried away and Pop began to hunt for his stick. The stick was elusive. In fact it might have occurred to an observer of Pop's maneuvers that Pop was looking for his stick by keeping an eye on the street, and especially on the pool-hall, from behind the curtains of the parlor. But Pop was no amateur. When the time was propitious he found the stick behind the kitchen door. A moment later he was on his way up the street.

Those who didn't know Pop might have thought he had failed to see the small crowd in front of the pool-hall. It wasn't much of a mob—just the lumberjacks and a few of the fellows from around town engaged in a semi-friendly conversation.

Pop almost passed the place—on the opposite side of the street. Suddenly he turned, looked across the street, and it was evident that his eagle eye was sweeping the scene. He merely ran to the pool-hall then, and his activity was superb. He pushed folks right and left with his stick.

"What's going on here?" he demanded in his best voice. Large globules of perspiration shone on his brow, even though the day was a little too chilly for comfort.

"I guess the boys were getting a little rough," said Bradley.

For a moment it seemed certain that Pop would make a dead break for home. But Bradley had edged around him, shutting off retreat, and it must be said for Pop that he rose to the occasion.

"You men," he thundered, "are under arrest!" He looked around. "Boys, please take these fellows down to the jail. I'll go ahead and unlock the door."

He turned and stamped away, striking the boards of the sidewalk with uncommonly vigorous thrusts of his cane. The prisoners, mellowed nicely by their liquor and respectful of the motion pictures they had seen which gave them an insight into the way of Western sheriffs, accompanied their escort, suddenly brought up to full war strength by the addition of the Bar Z boys who had come out of retirement with little fuss.

With the disturbers locked up, the usual peace of Sunday reigned in Cedar Gulch, and nothing more was heard of the affair until the following morning.

THEN Jim Bradley began to fret. Some of his best men were in the toils. He needed those men. By this time they would be sober and ready for work. So early in the morning he called on Pop.

"Pop," he said, "you can go up to the jail now and let them men of mine out. I reckon they're sober by this time."

"Yes sir, Jim, I'll do that at once, if you say so," agreed Pop, who was well enough pleased at the prospect of getting the men off his hands. But he added, by way of compromise, "Of course you'll have to come over with me when I let them out."

They went over to the jail and unlocked the door. The prisoners filed out sullenly and slouched over to the shack of Jim Bradley where they were hastily loaded into the truck and disappeared in a cloud of dust in the direction of Karab Cañon. Pop Carver heaved a sigh of relief, and with this considerable burden off his chest he began slowly to beat his way back to the little white house, there to fuss around among the shrubs, preparing things in a leisurely way for the winter.

But he had not been long engaged in this delightful occupation when he was harshly interrupted by the sudden appearance of Zeke Davis, foreman of the remnants of the Bar Z, in company with none other than Baldy Banning, clerk in the hardware store, who was also chief magistrate of Cedar Gulch.

"Where's your prisoners?" asked Judd.

Pop stood up from contemplation of the roots of a shrub.

"Oh, they're gone long ago."

"Gone!"

"Yes, gone—and good riddance!"

Judge Banning cleared his throat.

"But, Pop, who ordered their release?"

"Jim Bradley, the same as told me to lock them up." Pop was becoming just slightly alarmed, as one could observe by keeping an eye on his Adam's apple.

"But Jim Bradley had no authority to release those men. They were prisoners of the community, arrested for assault and battery and disturbing the peace. They must be brought to trial." The judge spoke crisply; there was impatience in his voice.

Pop spat.

"But, Judge,——'s bells! Jim told me to lock them up. Then he told me to never mind holding them any longer. So I let them go, of course."

"Well, where did they go?"

"Jim took them up to Karab Cañon, I reckon."

At this news Zeke Davis cursed roundly, like all foremen. He shifted his hat rather over one eye.

"Well," he said, "I don't withdraw my complaint. I ain't going to have my boys crippled up by those fellows. We got work to do. No sir! Them fellows'll have to stand trial."

The judge turned to Pop, who evidently wished he were out of town.

"You hear that, Pop? Well, that means just one thing—you got to get them fellows back here."

Pop spat again. He picked up his stick and traced a shallow trench in the soil. He looked furtively across the valley toward Karab Cañon, which lay a good two miles behind the town.

"—— bells!"

"Well, that's the way things stand, Pop."

Pop jabbed his cane into the earth. Again he looked at the cañon.

"They'll be in town again soon—"

"Sorry, but the law says today."

In despair Pop turned to Davis.

"Zeke, I'll let you wear my star if you'll be a good feller and chase up there after them —— rascals."

Davis looked solemnly at the ground.

"Gosh, Pop, if it wasn't against the law, I'd be glad to—a fact, I would!"

Pop hesitated.

"—— bells, Judge, it was Jim told me to lock them fellers up."

"That don't make no difference. You got to get them back here."

"Well—all right, then. I'll get them back."

An hour later Pop stood on the porch of the little white house. In one bulging pocket of the shiny blue serge coat was a lunch which had been prepared by his wife. Under his coat, but exposed in front, was a heavy belt, and the end of a long leather holster peeped from beneath the coat.

Pop leaned on his cane and looked up the street. Perhaps if he waited long enough some of the boys would go up to the cañon and get the lumberjacks. But after he had paid long tribute to the empty street with the most soulful and anxious gaze of his career, Pop heaved his sigh of sighs and began the pilgrimage.

But there still was hope. By taking the longest route out of town, he could traverse the entire main street. So he thrust his coat open in order to expose the gun, and began to walk. But he walked slowly. Now and then he found an imperfection in the sidewalk and each of these required minute examination with the end of the cane, in the interest of the public.

The windows of the stores held special attractions for the marshal as he walked along the sidewalk; he cast eager eyes this way and that while ostensibly engaged in the scrutiny of goods, hoping that some of the boys would appear on the horizon. He stopped in to pass the time of day with Jones the grocer, he dropped into the drug store for a package of tobacco, he went to ask whether the mail had arrived. But although he eagerly displayed his leather belt and permitted glimpses of the holster, and although at last in desperation he told of his unpleasant mission, nobody was interested in the coming crusade into the Karab.

So Pop eventually struck out boldly toward the cañon. It was a long walk, but by alternately resting and walking Pop moved persistently closer. When he

had gained the first of the trees in the mouth of the cañon he stopped and ate his lunch, refreshing himself with draughts of water from a spring. From that point on he walked up a considerable grade through the increasingly heavy forest.

It was well along in the afternoon when he finally saw the low shacks ahead of him among the pines and heard the sound of hammers and of human voices. Some men working on the nearest shack stopped their work and looked at him in wonder as Pop slowly approached them, nervously assisting himself with his stick.

He asked—

"Where is Jim Bradley?"

One of the men indicated a smaller and neater structure near by.

Never had Jim Bradley looked so delicious to Pop Carver as he did then when Pop found him in the little cabin. Pop could feel his lower lip quivering, and tears filled his eyes in spite of all he could do. Bradley had looked up in surprize when the marshal entered.

"What in the name of all that's mighty are you doing here? How'd you get here, in the first place?"

Pop controlled himself.

"I—I walked up, Jim. Duty is duty, you know. And now—darn it all!—I've got to take those men back."

"You've got to take them back?" The contractor looked puzzled.

"Yes. The judge and Zeke Davis came down this morning and told me I had to get them. They told me I had no business to let them go this morning just because you said so. Shucks, Jim, that's the way we've always worked things before!"

Bradley swore generously.

"Why, —— their measley souls, Pop! I met Banning just after we left town and he said it was all right. 'Sure, go ahead. What's the difference?' That's what he said, for a fact. The —— lice have put up a job on you, Pop!"

Pop slumped weakly in his chair. He wiped additional perspiration from his forehead.

"Well, darn them, then! Now they'll all have the laugh on me! Drat it!" Then he was struck by a redeeming angle of the affair. "But at any rate, I won't have to take the —— back now."

Bradley slammed his big fist on his improvised desk.

"But by ——, you will, though! We'll take them back and we'll make the judge hold a trial and we'll have every one of the Bar Z boys in as witnesses! They're in the midst of a round-up of those miserable mavericks of theirs, and if they can quit operations for a few days, so can I. Cone on, Pop, let's go. We'll load the men into the truck and get down there in a jiffy."

When the affair was explained to the men they were glad to return, for they sensed a little excitement, to say nothing of a relief from work. So the truck was loaded with not very repentant lumberjacks, and with Pop sitting on the seat beside the driver they roared into the town. Pop nodded to acquaintances right and left as they passed.

The lumberjacks were locked up, and Pop, leaving Bradley to deal with the judge in the hardware store, went home. He was quite done up. The sun had been warm at midday; the general exertion had been beyond his strength; the excitement had been extraordinary. He thumped his way slowly toward the little white house.

Mary had gone to a neighbor's, and Pop wobbled his feeble way to the corner of the dining-room which he called his office and sat down heavily in his ancient swivel chair which with the roll-top desk in front of it had come into Cedar Gulch in some mysterious way long before the memory of anybody now living. Over this desk, by way of lending an air to the place, were tacked a large number of square placards, each one bearing the photograph of somebody who, according to the flaring announcement, was either "wanted" or whose capture would bring a substantial "reward." These ranged from ancient scripts, yellowed with age, to the recent arrivals, which were nice and

white and still had creases in them from mailing.

Pop rested his burning feet by unlacing his shoes and then propping them on the desk. He lighted his pipe and smoked in short nervous puffs. As he smoked, he looked through lowered lids at the array of placards on the wall. These were the pride of Pop's life. He often treasured the idea that they gave the place a professional touch, not entirely unlike Scotland Yard for example. Whenever a new "reward" or "wanted" came, Pop exhibited it around the town, and made it a point to ask everybody to look out for the criminal.

"I hear he is headed this way," he would say.

Suddenly Pop opened wide his eyes. He took his feet from the desk. He stood up and carefully removed one of the bits of paper from the wall. He looked at the face long and silently. Then he folded it up and put it in his pocket.

Alas, there was to be no rest for Pop this day! With a deep sigh the marshal recognized his fate. With the puffs from his pipe slipping out between his lips like the exhaust of a miniature locomotive, he leaned over and carefully laced his shoes. When he had finished and had picked up his stick, he hesitated. For a fleeting instant he thought of unlacing his shoes again. But with a determined twist of his shoulders he marched out of the house and made directly for the hardware store.

He found Bradley sitting on the counter talking to Judge Banning. The latter Pop took special pains to ignore completely. He addressed himself elaborately to the contractor.

"Jim, could you step outside a moment?"

When they were on the sidewalk Pop took a deep breath, glanced up and down the street, then took the folded placard from his pocket and showed it to Bradley.

The contractor looked at it steadily for a moment, and then he swore from force of habit.

"By all that's good and holy, Pop, we've got that bird in the hoosegow!"

Pop cleared his throat.

"I thought so, Jim. Now Jim, listen: That man is a desperate character! No mistake about it! I spotted him for a criminal the minute I set eyes on him. That's the bird, all right. There's a thousand dollars reward. Them mail jobs always bring good rewards," he added professionally. He continued:

"To tell the truth, Jim, I'm getting old. I'm dizzy and all fagged out from today. I ain't got no business being marshal. I've been figuring on retiring for some time now. Mary's always afraid I'll get shot. Here's what I was thinking: Maybe you'd help me hog-tie that fellow, Jim. I'd give you half of the reward. It ain't that I'm afraid of the brute—"

"No, no," said Bradley nervously, and he put his hands in his pockets and took them out again. He looked this way and that. "The reward is yours, if we get away with it. Have you got any handcuffs down at your place?

Pop's brow wrinkled.

"Drat it, I'm not sure! Still, it seems to me I used to see a pair around there. Maybe Mary'd know—"

"Well, we won't look. You just run on along home, Pop, and don't say a word to anybody and I'll get the boys together. I've got some lariat rope over at my place, and we'll truss that fellow up for branding sure enough. Go on home now and don't say a word."

With a distinct sigh, but with a relieved air about the hang of his shoulders, Pop began to tap the sidewalk with his cane, which trembled now at every step.

THAT evening there was great excitement in the town. One of the lumberjacks was tied up with enough lariat rope to hog-tie the whole miserable maverick remnants of the Bar Z herd. He was trussed up and no mistake about it, hardly able to breathe for the rope that all but made a mummy of him.

And Pop was in the pool-hall. His weary eyes were aflame from the first drop of liquor that had crossed his lips for twenty years. Around him had

gathered the entire male population of the town.

Pop was saying:

"No sooner'd I let them fellers out when I saw that one of them was a real criminal. You get so you can tell those birds a mile away. I went up to the lumber camp and pinched him. And he's killed three men in Chicago, that bird has. I just covered him with my gun—"

One of the Bar Z boys was rude enough to interrupt. He nodded toward the six-shooter at Pop's belt.

"Is that the gun, Pop?"

Pop patted the worn leather holster affectionately.

"Yep, that's Old Betsy!"

The cowboy reached over.

"Let's see her, will you?" he asked, and he helped himself to the mighty piece of steel. With a flip of his wrist he opened it. It was empty.

Pop looked at the gun in dismay.

"Well— Well, I must have taken a couple of shots at the miscreant!"

The cowboy was looking at the gun.

"I thought I recognized it," he said, "That's the old cannon Pete Larkin used to own. ——, that gun ain't had a mainspring in it for fifteen years!"

BUT now, when tourists from the East come through town, Pop Carver, the ex-gun fighter, the fellow who had his picture in the Chicago papers last year, the former bad man and two-gun sheriff, is the principal attraction of the town. He has retired, of course.

"I've always wanted to, for some years back," he'd explain, "and Mary was always after me to quit, on account of the danger. So when I got the reward I turned the keys of the jail over to a younger man."

By his side he carries an ancient six-shooter in a worn leather holster. It's a monstrous gun, and the tourists look at in in respectful awe.

"That's Old Betsy," explains Pop, affectionately patting the leather, "and when Old Betsy speaks, something happens. The boys let me keep it as a sort of souvenir when I left office, in view of the fact that the two of us hadn't been apart for twenty years. And there's many a good shot left in her yet."

And along about noon Pop slaps his cane on the boards and stumps away toward the little white house where he's trying out a new species of peony that he sent clear to Salt Lake for. Pop has a theory that they'll do fine in that climate.

WILLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON

Comes back to our pages

in

Big Business in Bombay

THE still humid air of Bombay settled about Val like a hot sodden blanket. He began to wonder if he could ever get out of the place. He felt as if he had let himself into a Black Hole of his own making. Every time he caught a glimpse of the Parsi Towers of Silence, with the fattening buzzards and crows circling above the grids, he felt an intensified longing for another interview with Eddie Hillier, the flippant junior partner who had sent him with golden promises to India. His belief in Eddie's commercial sagacity was steel-bound and certain facts were rapidly convincing him that Eddie had sent him to Bombay under false pretenses. After all it had been the senior partner, old man Van Buren, who had hired him in spite of Eddie's discouragement.

Val remembered with a shock Eddie's last hint:

"You know, Val, the great Macaulay started his literary career as a clerk in Bombay! Fine place to stimulate the imagination!"

He couldn't remember whether or not Eddie had grinned when he made that remark, but he rather thought he had, though in the confusion of hasty departure his recollection was dim.

As the season went into the summer the heat increased—persistent, damp, oppressive heat that took the energy out of every one and made the gloomy office seem dank and suffocating. One fortunate commission came Val's way and aroused his interest and occupied his spare time, though there was no profit in it.

He received a nice friendly letter from Mrs. Van Buren, asking him to order some rugs for her, some carved teakwood and Benares brasswork. He felt a pleasant glow at being singled out by the old lady for this very agreeable task and for the fact that she left it somewhat to him to exercise his taste and judgment in making the purchases.

"But why did she pick on you?" said Potts, the English manager, when Val showed him the letter, asking advice.

Val was non-committal. Potts slapped his palm sharply on the desk.

"By George," said he, "that explains it! Ten to one she's going to furnish a house for them!"

"For who?" said Val, forgetting he was supposed to be following in Macaulay's literary footsteps.

"Van Buren's daughter and your friend Eddie Hillier!"

"You think," said Val stiffly, resenting the idea with indignation, though he had not even known Van Buren possessed a daughter, "you think that Eddie Hillier is going to marry the daughter, eh?"

"Dead certainty," said Potts. "Believed it for some time. Fact is, how the —— else could he have got into the firm? Can't conceive of any other reason."

"You can't?" said Val, with the utmost astonishment. "Why, Eddie is supposed to be one of the cleverest young business fellows in New York."

"Really?" said Potts.

"Let me tell you something. While he was still in an officers' training camp he made fifty thousand dollars on the sale of a ship in Atlanta. Then he made a clear profit of one hundred thousand dollars on orders he placed for the firm in Russia. And another hundred thousand in Japan."

"Ha-ha!" said Potts, lighting a cigaret.

"Well, ha-ha!" said Val with sudden exasperation. "Proves something, though, doesn't it?"

"It doesn't prove anything to me! Hillier's a good advertiser, but that's all! Sort of a *feu de joie*—a lot of gunfire and no hits! A lot of noise!"

"What about those deals?" demanded Val, stubbornly holding on to his convictions.

"What! Haven't you heard that that ship in Atlanta belonged to the Shipping Board, and was withdrawn from private sale? As to the Russian contracts—pooh-pooh! Then those Japanese orders. There's been a slump in Japan. Catch a Jap paying for futures on a falling market!"

Val felt as though the blocks had been kicked from under him. What a disillusioning picture of the young executive! And the deuce of it was that he knew instantly this was the true picture! He felt the hair riffle on his scalp, accompanied by an impulse to give a roar of profanity. Instead, he simply blinked thoughtfully at Potts. He went back to his desk determined to resign at once.

The exotic touch which the natives might have given the offices was spoiled by the fact that above the desks they looked like rather dark complexioned Europeans, their costumes being in most respects similar to those of poorly paid clerks in London. Below the waist, however, they were oriental. Kipling's dictum about tucking the shirt-tail in was quite correct. Their shirt-tails flapped

in the wind, their spindly hairy legs were bare except for a loosely twisted white cloth that hung to the knees and oversized shoes from which they could draw their feet at will.

Here and there a pale European lifted his head as Val entered uncertainly, and looked at him defensively through puffs of nervously inhaled cigaret smoke. As the first of a possible invasion of American employees he was an object of peculiar interest. Holding his job was too serious a proposition for an Englishman to consider lightly.

As Val sat at his desk composing his letter of resignation which he intended to be a first-rate example of Macaulay's most excellent style of razor-edged satire, he recalled old Mrs. Van Buren's motherly compliments. He also considered that the other chaps in the office badly needed vacations in the hills, while he was still comparatively fresh. Lastly, he realized that if he resigned, he had absolutely no money with which to pay his passage home, even disregarding the fact that he was in debt to the firm for two months' advance of salary.

"I guess," said he gloomily, "that means a personal reorganization. I'll have to save some money before I can hope to get out of this mess."

The first thing he did was to put into operation a plan of economy he had been considering since he began the study of Hindustani.

ACTING on the advice of his *munchi*, he gave up his room at the hotel, without a word to any one in the office, and took a room with a semi-native family in an apartment on the third story of a building in the Bara Bazaar.

"If I can't earn," said he, "I'll learn!"

The husband was a shadowy Goanese, fine of feature but dark, thin, silent, with a natural preference for walking about the house barefoot; while the wife was a plump comely creature who was partly of Levantine extraction, partly of Hindu. She dressed in soft negligées and smiled at Val with sleepy eyes.

Val couldn't make out much about the servants or relations, such a variety of types continually milled about the rooms, from the fat little half-naked *chokra* whom the hot-headed cook drove about the kitchen with unexpected bursts of fury, to the stately though somewhat furtive *munchi* with drooping mustache and a caste-mark smudged on his forehead. He watched the quarrels, the flirtations, the trifling intrigues, the economies, and sudden impulses to enjoyment, with increasing delight. It seemed to him like a household of amusing harmless children, and his American good-humor often boiled over in hearty guffaws.

One day as he absent-mindedly stirred his after-dinner coffee, he became aware that the sugar was not dissolving. Lifting some of it on his spoon to investigate—behold—it reflected the lamplight in tiny glitterings.

"Ground glass!" exclaimed di Silva, seizing a carving knife and gliding into the kitchen.

The chubby little *chokra* had sought indirect vengeance against the cook by destroying Val!

But Val lived on, more cautiously, more shrewdly, coming closer and closer to an understanding of the mental operations of his polyglot neighbors, experiencing all the while a curious guilty feeling that he was being immoral, doing something that simply was *not* done.

Habitually he consumed curries, *pilaus*, unanalyzable sweetmeats, strange pickles and condiments, pungent fruits, rice cooked in *ghi* and dredged with cardamon and cloves, until he seemed to himself to have become saturated with the smell of the bazaar. In the dark no native dog would have taken him for a *Frangi*. If there had been an outbreak of cholera that season, he would have had no further reason to think of passage home.

He learned a lot about the supposed mystery of caste, which he found to be nothing more than the clannishness of Scotchmen with a veneer of English conventions over it, cemented hard by the

intolerance of differing religious beliefs and ages-old customs. It was simply unadulterated human prejudice against the stranger. But he understood before even the keenest English observers that everything yields to necessity in India as elsewhere, and was not at all shocked or even surprized when a sweeper—whose presence nearer than sixty feet renders a Brahmin unclean—was elected by popular suffrage to an official position in Delhi.

The exasperating restraint, social and economic, which had been imposed upon him because of his lack of money made him understand more clearly the weariness and utter emptiness of the lives of the natives who worked in the factories, mills and powerhouses, sometimes sixteen hours at a stretch even in torrid weather—thin, wan creatures who poured ominously into the bazaars, like a sluggish tide of rodents dangerous with disease.

On the other hand he found an attractive glamor in the noises, the open shops with the strangely jumbled wares, the confusion of tongues, the outlandish *tikkagharries* and bullock-carts, the shadows and yellow lights of night, the shrieking nasal songs that pierced the darkness, spluttering arc-lights, ear-splitting phonograph records, accompanied by the high-pitched vibrations of curious musical instruments, flutes and drums. He found that in this congested community of fellow beings, despite their repressions, life beat strongly.

"They are a mass of anemic nonentities!" protested Potts furiously, as he tried to make an analysis of a stagnant market. "No blood! No emotion! No passion! We can't stir them! We can't get *at* them! Ghandi's got the right idea! Non-resistance is the only force they're capable of using. They're like sick camels lying down in traffic. Nothing can stir them. Nothing! If they only had some passion, we might understand. But they're really incapable of actual violence. Did you ever see this fellow Ghandi?"

"Yes."

"Oh, is that so?" said Potts surprized. "Where?"

"In a room down in the Bara Bazaar. It was too hot for me, so I got out. He's a little fellow, about as big as a peanut, with big ears, a black mustache and calf-eyes with spectacles—"

"What was he talking about?"

"Well, I didn't catch it all, of course. Near as I could make out, he doesn't believe in large cities, mills, and that sort of thing. He wanted every one in India to spin two thousand yards of yarn a month—"

"—— cheek, I call that!" said Potts furiously.

"He said it will come in time. He said that 'good travels at a snail's pace'."

"That's it! There you've got it!" exclaimed Potts, delightedly. " 'Good travels at a snail's pace!' If he'd said cotton goods travel at a snail's pace, he would have hit the ruddy nail smack on the head! Snails! No get up and go in them!"

Val became a trifle self-conscious. He merely looked blank, wondering. Wondering considerably—having in mind the lazy, warm-blooded wife of di Silva.

She never failed to come drifting into his room whenever he made his appearance in the house. Always there was a legitimate reason for this intrusion: The *dhobi* had arrived with the wash; a dealer had brought some rugs for examination; there was a bit of brasswork which a cousin had found in the bazaar. Mrs. di Silva simply wanted to practise her English on him. But she lingered—lingered long enough to make Val nervous, tidying his things, spreading his clothes, opening the shutters to let in chance breezes, smiling meltingly when she caught his eye.

Val was becoming rather accustomed to the carelessness and informality about this sort of life in India. There were few doors; everything was open; the hot weather obliged people to dress in the flimsiest negligée; the people in the streets and the servants in the house—men and women—were often half-naked, though

the women never forgot modesty. They were really extremely decorous in their safeguards so far as strangers were concerned; but Val had ceased to be a stranger while remaining an object of great curiosity to the women.

They were pretty, many of them, with their scarlet betel-inflamed lips and warm brown skins, and the softness of their glances seemed inviting; but Val didn't know. What he had learned from Kipling rather scared him off. He knew that in the abstract Hindus looked upon women as the finer vessels, not the weaker; but it looked to him as though this sort of fine philosophizing was a lot of bunk.

One day when he was alone with the amiable spouse of di Silva, she said in a soft hesitant voice—

"Sir, all the *yogis* in the universe can not help you if you will not help yourself!"

Val looked at her with bulging eyes.

"The *devas* of heaven," she continued breathlessly, "will bring you success in all things absolutely, if you will only dare to venture! If you will only dare to have confidence! If you will dare to seize the opportunity! This thing I know, my lord, absolutely, because I have consulted an astrologer who charged me one rupee, six annas! Besides I feel it here," she added, pressing her hands to her bosom, her accents becoming thicker, more confused. "If you will only seize the opportunity!"

"I beg your pardon," stammered Val.

"Oh, sir," she murmured, drifting against him, "the holy *yogi* told *me* to beware, because *I* belong to the cusp of Gemini-Cancer; and—and—the desires of my heart are stronger than my will to resist!"

And after Val had taken one immeasurable look into the limpid black eyes the holy *yogi* might have said precisely the same thing about him! Because it was beyond *his* power to resist! As he kissed her feverishly, only pausing to catch a strangling breath, all at once he heard a noise in the rear of the apartment.

Cutting his arms away with a snap, he jerked about in time to see the shadowy figure of di Silva, gliding barefoot across the hall, the whites of his eyes showing in the gloom.

The wife had not seen; but Val said with some dignity, between gasps—

"Your husband is there!"

Mrs. di Silva left the room calmly, with an enigmatic little smile on her lips. Val remained standing in the middle of the floor, well away from dark corners, wondering whether this would mean a knife in his back or ground glass for the lady who had been so unfortunate as to have been born in the cusp of Gemini-Cancer.

Then, remembering that all the *yogis* of the universe could not help him unless he dared to seize his opportunity, Val fled.

Packing his suitcase secretly, and hiring a competent *hamal* to extract his steamer trunk without arousing comment, he departed ingloriously, and secured himself a room with a respectable European family as far away from the Bara Bazaar as possible.

FOR a while he lost his interest in wandering through the dark streets at night. For penance he set himself to writing some very nice letters to old Mrs. Van Buren, who was delightfully impressed by them. She might very well have been, for they were striking bits of creative art! He sent her letters about the things he bought—sweeping, untrammeled letters that transported her to all sorts of places; from "Karachi, sentinel of the Persian Gulf, where the camel trains come to a final halt with their cargoes from the heart of Asia, and the fleets of dhows set out with only the stars to guide them down to Zanzibar" to the "bazaars of Delhi swarming with natives of a hundred races, gay with colored garments, weaving the pattern of a human oriental rug."

"Dear me," murmured old Mrs. Van Buren, "what an observing young man! Walter *must* take us to India!"

"Some day," muttered Val, as he took

the cigaret from his lips, and studied the typewritten lines with a quizzical gaze, "if I ever get enough dibs in the bank, I'll buy me a couple of railroad tickets and go and see if all this is correct."

One by one the wan European clerks slipped away to gorgeous hill stations, returning as ignorant as when they started, their recollections being chiefly of women they had met and teas they had managed to intrude upon. Yet Val listened with envy.

Most of all, however, did he envy Potts, who went off for three weeks to Simla, actually leaving him in charge, reciting cheerily as he left—

"So long as Tara Devi sees
The lights o' Simla town."

The oppressive heat passed; the monsoon came and went with its refreshing downpours. November approached.

If possible, business became worse.

Ghandi's power was taking such an extraordinary hold upon the imagination of the people that for the first time in history all the jarring elements of the country began to harmonize to gain a common end—dominance over the British by the inert weight of non-cooperation.

The long list of failures in Bombay was already appalling, and gloom and nerves combined to bring a large number of the local merchants, both native and foreign, to the verge of panic and despair. Even the resilient Potts felt the depression. This was chiefly because old Van Buren, in whom he had implicit confidence, had started on his tour of the world, reached Japan, and disappeared into the silence.

"Heard from the family?" asked Potts uneasily.

Val had heard but he didn't have the heart to show his letter, because it definitely marked the end of what had been an agreeable correspondence! The old lady, when she was leaving New York, had evidently spoken too freely to Eddie Hillier about Val's charming letters.

"Either Mr. Hillier has an extraordinary spite against you—he expressed himself *very positively*," she wrote in a brief conclusive note, "or else you have a most charming imagination! I recall that Lord Macaulay was once employed in Bombay—"

This letter had been mailed in Japan; and Val knew he would never receive another line from Mrs. Van Buren.

Shortly afterward, however, Potts told him that Van Buren himself had returned to the New York office.

"Something's up," said Potts. "When the old codger doesn't know his own mind we've got a right to feel nervous!"

THE most anxious people in India were without doubt the police. They were very much opposed to the visit of the Prince of Wales, and with good reason. The unrest, the assured threat of a paralyzing strike throughout the country, the intangible nature of Ghandi's leadership, all combined to make a genuine crisis. If anything happened to young Wales there would be an explosion that would rock the world.

At this fear the Mahatma Ghandi smiled a sweet and tolerant smile.

He himself was as nearly a saint as any living man can meet in these strident days. Life to him was nothing—principle everything. Violence an unthinkable horror. In his beliefs the great leader was perfectly sincere. His co-religionists regarded it as an act of high merit to give sanctuary to vermin on their bodies, on the principle that even these are creatures with souls seeking a higher plane! Would you destroy the living tomb of your late lamented mother-in-law? These people believed in giving her a chance. How could it be possible, then, to do violence to any man, much less a prince?

"Perceive its absurdity!" said the Mahatma Ghandi with a patient smile.

SHORTLY before the arrival of the Prince of Wales, Potts began to feel exceedingly seedy. The doctors promptly ordered him up into the hills again.

Potts did not want to go; but being a good-natured man with a naturally lazy temperament he took alarm and obeyed in haste. He went to Kashmir, hoping to do a little shooting.

Before leaving Bombay, Potts unhesitatingly put Val in charge. There was very little to do except the simplest sort of routine and the departing manager left only one strict admonition:

"Don't bother me unless there's a ruddy catastrophe! If you get into difficulties, go around to the bank and ask Arnold's advice. He's a good chap, and knows just about where we stand."

Potts had not been gone long when Val had to go around to the bank anyway. The job was a delicate one. A cryptic inquiry had come from old Van Buren, directing Potts secretly to test the strength of the firm's credit at the bank.

Val found Arnold to be a thin, middle-aged man, bored, slightly querulous in his manner; but with a broad knowledge of oriental business, and very quick in his perceptions. Van Buren & Hillier were already carrying two large overdrafts with him, with American cotton actually in Bombay godowns as collateral.

"That's all right," said Arnold, discussing the financial condition of the local branch; "but with the price of cotton steadily going down the prospect of getting rid of it grows less, doesn't it?"

"Even in India," protested Val, "people can't go naked forever! With cooler weather there's bound to be a demand. The price is bound to go up!"

"That's all very well; but I'm afraid you don't quite realize the significance of the political situation. Prices won't go up as long as Ghandi's influence holds!"

"So Potts seems to think," said Val.

"Potts is often right. But that's not the point. I've got to look at it from the bank's point of view. Every one is trying to load us up with cotton all in a rush, and I can't quite see it. You cotton dealers may have some optimism left, but I don't see even a gambling chance of a rise for some time to come. You're all looking for bigger loans, and at the same time the value of your collateral grows less—"

"That," said Val, with a wan smile, "was more or less what I had in mind myself! There's some stuff I wanted to buy for export and I wanted extra cash—"

"My dear fellow!" protested Arnold with a hurt expression. "As a matter of fact, Potts wangled an overdraft out of me that's entirely beyond the margin of safety. Had I known he was going away he wouldn't have got it. I told him five days ago I wanted more collateral. I've really got to have it, you know! Can't you people sell some of this stuff? Take my word, it's better to take your loss now—"

Val's heart sank. This put the cap on the faintest hope of getting more money from the bank!

"I can't sell at a loss, you know," he said absent-mindedly, "without Potts' sanction."

"Well, this bank didn't send Potts off to Kashmir," protested Arnold irritably. "We don't concern ourselves with his personal activities, you know. Our dealings are with the firm, Van Buren & Hillier, through you or Potts or whoever exercises power-of-attorney for them. Your power-of-attorney is registered, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, then, I don't see why you can't sell?"

"I'll see what New York has to say about it," suggested Val.

"Got a lot of confidence in old Van Buren," said Arnold. "But what about this other chap, Hillier?"

"He's got the reputation of being one of the smartest—"

"As to that," interrupted Arnold impatiently, "most of the failures have been among the smart ones. A merchant has to take chances, of course; but no one succeeds unless he has a clear understanding of what he's about. These smart young gamblers usually turn out to be flashes. Go up in smoke!"

Val returned to the office feeling insecure and baffled.

He felt considerably more baffled when he found another cablegram from Van Buren directing him immediately to consult the firm's legal counsel in Bombay about the necessary formalities for local notice of dissolution of the firm. Eddie Hillier was no longer in the business!

"——!" said Val, staring at the slip of paper with fascination, confusedly realizing that Eddie was not the kind of chap to turn his back on a paying proposition. He wondered if by any chance he had eloped with Van Buren's daughter, and gone into business for himself. One thing was certain—he was no longer a member of the firm. "And that bird sent me out here," said Val savagely, "to make my fortune!"

An hour later another cablegram explained everything, though it almost knocked Val cold:

> All agencies must remit to the fullest extent prior to month's end. Your quota is sixty thousand dollars. Averting Hillier's disastrous speculation. I depend upon the old guard. —VAN BUREN.

Val didn't finish his cigaret. He came out of a coma with a shock, went down the stairs three at a time, leaped into a gharry, clattered rapidly away to the telegraph office, and sent this privately to Potts—

> Extremest emergency, return immediately.

The reply was prompt—

> Potts went into hospital today with typhoid fever.

Val leaned back in his chair with a scared look on his face. His eyes rolled languidly up to the swaying punkah above his head. He folded his hands in his lap, thumbs slowly revolving around each other.

"—— situation!" he murmured. After an hour which he spent apparently plunged in profound thought, he sighed and murmured again, "—— situation."

THOUGH he had sense enough on the following day to consult the firm's lawyers and register his new power-of-attorney, Val was still in a stupid daze.

Toward the end of the day, as the sleepy shadows of evening began to fill the office where he still sat, scratching his head, biting his thumbnail, and staring blankly at the papers that were on the desk before him, his mind wandering absurdly from one irrelevant object to another, all at once he thought of Mrs. di Silva and he smiled with sickly self-consciousness at the passionate earnestness with which she had repeated the *yogi's* forecast—

"The *devas* of heaven will bring you success in all things if you will only dare to venture!"

Then he remembered the wistful, slightly frightened look on old Van Buren's face that day in New York, when he had hired him.

"I'm taking you on myself. I—I need young blood!"

Val realized all at once that he owed all his loyalty to this old man. He became exasperated and disgusted with himself at his mental helplessness but his backbone had stiffened.

The issue was plain. Without a substantial remittance to New York before the end of the month Van Buren would go to the wall. Yet, so far as Val could see, there was not a dollar to be taken out of this stagnant market pool. The quarters of the firm were held on lease; there was no chance of raising a mortgage. The goods held locally in godowns were all tied up as collateral for the overdrafts at the bank and the market was virtually dead.

"On the other hand," said Val, rising abruptly to his feet, "if I don't take a chance on something we're lost anyway!"

He went immediately into the bazaar with Bagwandass Dewjee, his broker; but the liveliest imagination could scrape up no more business than an order for twelve bales of second-hand European garments, and another for twenty bales of American illustrated Sunday newspapers to be used as wrappers in little native shops.

"This is scavenging!" he protested, almost ashamed to forward the orders,

but there was a big enough profit to cover current expenses.

The next day he heard of a ship in Alexandria loaded with salt and before night he had found a market for it in Singapore. That was a stimulating stroke, for though the profit would amount to only a few thousand dollars, on a slim margin, it got Val's brain working on a more sweeping scale.

It occurred to him that there might be a chance for speculation with the clove crop of Zanzibar and Pemba; but to work this successfully would require the smoothest cooperation between New York and himself, and he knew that Van Buren could be in no condition to undertake any new ventures. Then he thought of jute, but abandoned this because of the expert competition he would have to face.

"Still," he thought, "I'm about ready to take a chance on anything, if I can only get my hooks into it."

While in this jubilant and aggressive frame of mind, the bank got him on the phone. Arnold very querulously informed him that he would positively have to put up more collateral.

In an instant Val's jubilation was gone. He had the sensation of a susceptible passenger at the moment when the prow of the vessel he's on has reached the dizziest point of ascent and is about to drop down with a rush into the trough. Gulping slightly, he closed his eyes and listened.

"Have you heard the news?" said Arnold wearily, by way of explanation.

"No."

"Ghandi has notified Lord Reading formally that he intends to start his campaign of non-cooperation! It's no longer a rumor. We're up against *pukka* fact! You can guess what's happening to the market!"

"Do they expect fighting?" asked Val mechanically.

"Fighting? Don't be silly! The whole trouble is economic. Certainly there won't be fighting. The whole basis of the movement is non-violence. They intend to lie down in herds and do nothing—die of starvation, I suppose. They're perfectly capable of it too!"

"Ghandi is capable of it," admitted Val with a flicker of interest.

"They are sheep of the same flock. They'll follow the leader. Sort of throw themselves under the wheels of the Juggernaut, you know. If it were a prospect of violence we faced, I'd feel more comfortable. Clear the atmosphere, you know. Clap on martial law—and there's an end to it!"

"You don't expect any violence, then?"

"No one does!"

"Then I can't understand," said Val, making diagrams with a pencil on the desk-blotter, while a furrow of concentration appeared between his brows, "why every one's so jumpy, especially you English. You've had strikes before!"

"This is not a strike! It simply means that all productive work in the country stops, absolutely and completely. It means general stagnation. And the only way to settle it is for foreigners to clear out!"

"Whee!" exclaimed Val, stabbing the blotter with the pencil. "If that's the way you're sizing up the situation, I'll choke you with collateral!"

After hanging up the phone, Val stared at the wall for a moment with sharp eyes, then he jumped to his feet.

"Bagwandass!" he called sharply. The native broker dropped his cigaret and came on the run. "Bagwandass, what do they think is going to happen in the bazaar? Any fighting? Remember, I'm an American. I don't care about your politics. We have some pretty bad mix-ups in America too over politics. I'm talking business! Do they expect a rumpus—rioting, fighting?"

"Oh, no, no, no, sir!" said Bagwandass with an expression of disgust, and a suave gesture that dismissed the repugnant thought.

"Aren't they making any move to protect stocks?"

"What can do, sir? There is no need to protect. We have every assurance

there will be no disturbance of the people."

"We're off!" said Val. "I want you to make out a bunch of contracts, *purchasing*—amounts anywhere from fifty to five thousand bales—and have them ready in half an hour. You and I are going to *buy!*"

"Purchasing!" exclaimed Bagwandass with a broken gasp, clapping his hand against his forehead, with wildly distended eyes.

"Yes. Let's snap into it! We're going to buy!"

"Sir, you are making a mistake! This is not based on sound reasoning!"

"Bagwandass, your commission on purchases is one-quarter per cent., isn't it? That's where your responsibility ends! I intend to buy any quantity up to ten thousand bales—and possibly more! All contracts must be firm and binding for goods in Bombay—with at least thirty days' credit."

Bagwandass sighed deeply, made a gesture of disparagement, then, galvanized, rushed to a typewriter.

BEFORE the closing hour next day Val had secured control of over seven thousand bales in addition to the stuff that was held as collateral by Arnold. His sudden raid made little impression since the attention of the market was directed upon Ghandi and the effect his leadership would have on the country. But he stopped buying at this point, not from nervousness, because if his reasoning was false he had already bought enough to doom him, but because he wanted to match the next move of the market and the country.

The next morning Bagwandass rushed into the office, his lips flecked with red saliva from the lime-and-betel he had been chewing.

"My God, sir!" he stammered. "Have you heard the news? There has been bloodshed! This is correct information! It is already in the papers. It happened at Cahuri-Choura, sir. There has been much bloodshed, and people killed, sir! There has been actual violence. My God, sir! My commissions! It is altogether a dreadful business, sir!"

"I want to see you in an hour," said Val quietly, with an extraordinary expression in his eyes.

He picked up the phone and verified the rumor. The whole country was petrified. There was a flurry of apprehension and panic. Every one, apparently, was astounded and horrified by the news. For a time a vague terror hung over the cities and market towns. Visions of the Mutiny rose up like a befogging miasma.

When the agitated Bagwandass reappeared in Val's office, wiping his sweating face repeatedly with the end of his turban, Val said with imperturbable assurance:

"Make out another batch of contracts like yesterday's. Be snappy, because we want to get into the bazaar before anything else happens!"

That day he contracted for nine thousand bales at the bottom of a wrecked market.

Then Val went around to Arnold and told him what he had done.

After staring for a measurable period at the American who faced him cheerfully across the desk, Arnold said in the tired voice of a man who has survived many periods of wild speculation and unnecessary ruin:

"I suppose now you'll shoot yourself—and leave this mess on my hands! What do you propose to do?"

"I thought I might run up and see poor old Potts," said Val brightly.

"'So long as Tara Devi sees
The lights o' Simla town—'"

"Do you realize what you've done?" demanded Arnold harshly, his eyes taking a glint of steel.

"Sure, I do!" said Val.

"By ——!" exclaimed Arnold, white, unable to control himself. "I'll have to have some assurance from your firm now — or —"

"Now, listen. If I've made a mistake, it won't make any difference to you whether you take hold today or a week

from now. The things's done! My contracts are steel-bound! If there's a crash, no one can stop it now. But I tell you I'm acting on good knowledge. All I ask is to be let alone for a day or two. You can chance that, can't you? At the worst, your losses on our account won't cripple you."

"*Atcha!*" said Arnold with a gesture of oriental fatalism.

TWO days later the two men again faced each other across the desk. Val could not control the grin that spread across his features. Arnold chewed his mustache, shook his head occasionally, and looked at the American bewilderedly.

"Go on," he urged.

"It's all in the papers," said Val. "It seems that as soon as the reports reached Ghandi, and he realized what he'd started, he went straight to the nearest police inspector. He fell down on his knees and commenced to cry—admitted he'd made a mistake, said that the hearts of the people were not yet pure enough to submit to his principles!"

"Humph!" said Arnold.

"The inspector was hard-boiled. 'That doesn't bring back the lives of the people you've killed,' he said. 'The blame rests right on you.' And Ghandi laid down on his face, and said over and over again, 'Punish me! It is my fault! I have failed!' "

"I can understand all that," said Arnold, "but I can't understand how you, *an American*, could figure out just what would happen, and use that information at the psychological moment to catch the turn of the market. *That* beats me!"

Val laughed a little self-consciously.

"Used my imagination," he said. "When I first came out here, instead of trying to learn about the bazaars in the clubs, I went down into the bazaar and got my information first-hand. I learned about Ghandi among other things, and I was convinced that he was absolutely sincere. I was convinced too that he firmly believed he'd converted the bulk of the people of India to his way of thinking. He had. But he hadn't converted them to his way of acting! I knew perfectly well, from personal observation, that if they got worked up to a highly emotional state there would be an explosion. It seemed to me inevitable. And if Ghandism failed non-cooperation would fail with it—and normal conditions would come back with a rush. Right?"

"It certainly seems so!" said Arnold, checking over a column of figures on his desk. "You've got these fellows by the short hairs."

"All their wives have stopped making homespun; and they're going to the movies instead! I'll tell you what I'd like you to do, Arnold, if you don't mind. I want you to hold these contracts as collateral, and when they show a margin large enough, remit a hundred thousand dollars to Van Buren in New York. Can do?"

"*Atcha*," said Arnold, nodding in agreement. "But why don't you want to hold on to them yourself?"

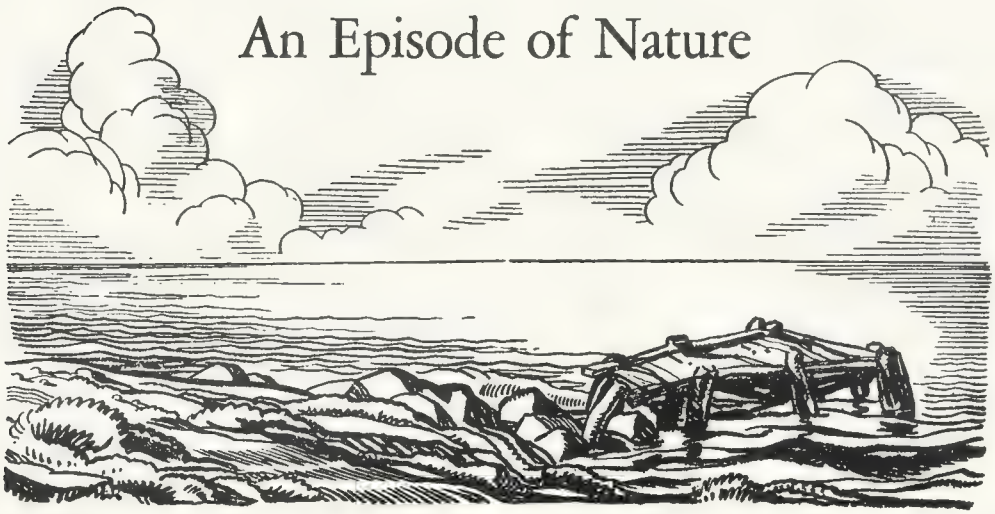
"Well, I need a vacation. You see, I didn't go to the hills this year, and I want to buy me a couple of tickets and see if my information about India is correct. Besides, I want to explain things to Potts. There are some opportunities for big business out here and I intend to go after them."

"Right-o," said Arnold. "Like to have you dine with me at the club before you leave."

"Very pleased," said Val, casually, though thoroughly aware that the club mentioned was the most exclusive institution of the sort in the Orient and that an invitation to enter its portals meant he had received the accolade of the English raj. "Very pleased. And a little bridge afterward."

Scavengers of the Surf

An Episode of Nature



BY HARRY R. PETERSON

TWO hundred strong, with their heads all pointed toward the shore, a school of silvery fish swam slowly into the long back-wash between the rearing combers and the beach. If you could have looked through that white churning water you would have seen them break ranks and dart to left and right in swift quartering rushes, searching for every bit of edible flotsam washed out from the sand. They sucked in the food with pendulous round mouths and balanced their iridescent bodies against the pull of the strong undertow with huge winglike fins.

Any fish not so well equipped with weapons for a constant battle with those wicked rip tides, thundering combers and ever-changing fields of foam would have been smothered, rolled over and over, and cast up to the herring gulls on the shore. But the corbina or surf fish* were thoroughly at home in a welter of water whose undersuck would have thrown a man flat and carried him out to struggle with the curling green walls beyond.

That comparatively smooth stretch of the mist-shrouded Pacific surf, between the breakers and the shore, was the playground, dinner table and natural dwelling place of the corbina. The objective of the school was the water beneath a ruined wharf, selected as an ideal feeding-place by the leader, a big six-pounder, twenty-two inches long.

The lip of this corbina was split by a long scar, the result of a recent encounter with a surf fisherman near this wharf. He had struck at a red rock worm. In the ensuing struggle with the invisible enemy he had wound part of the line around the barnacle-encrusted piling of the wharf. Against those sharp shells even the strong nine-strand line was

*Menticirrhus undulatus, surf, or California whiting.

useless—it snapped. Later the surf fish tore the hook out of his mouth and investigated more closely this spot that seemed to offer more safety than the open water.

Broken off at the shore end by the winter storms, the old wharf was protected from enemies in this direction by a swift channel. Jagged rocks imbedded in the sand to make the foundation firmer contained many crevices in which a fish could hide from dangers of the sea. Under the ruined piling the corbina found a large bed of scurrying sand crabs, his favorite food. It was a haven of many advantages, and thereafter he led his school of sand scavengers in to the quiet water beneath the wharf each day with the first big breakers of the incoming tide.

The surf fish were not undisputed in their possession of the sand-crab bed. Little spotted leopard sharks, a foot long, slipped over the ribbed sand-bottom and stared at the clean, active corbina speculatively, as if they knew that later, when grown to a length of four feet, their needle-like teeth could make short work of a surf scavenger. But when that time arrived they would feed much farther out to sea. As the water under the wharf was only two or three feet deep at the full flood, a large shark might easily find himself stranded by the ebbing tide.

Occasionally a slab-sided yellow-fin ventured into the back-wash from its feeding ground beyond the first line of breakers. But the visitor usually found the eddies too strong for its liking and soon returned seaward. Barred surf perch inhabited the deeper holes out a little farther from the shore. More dangerous, though not swift enough swimmers to menace the corbina, were the flat shovel-nosed sharks that sometimes invaded the inner surf in troops of fifty or more when food was scarce outside, or a heavy ground swell disturbed the water.

Only once during the summer was it necessary for the corbina to scatter in all directions to the nearest hiding places. This occurred when a ten-foot tide had deepened the water to four feet. A bluish torpedo-like shape that sculled swiftly over the sand had circled around the feeding ground, looked longingly at the vanishing corbina, but finding the water a little too shallow, had gone silently back to the depths.

More disturbing to the surf fish than any intruders from the ocean were the human enemies of the land, who soon discovered that a school of these desirable fish came regularly to the water near the abandoned wharf. During the summer week-ends surf-fishermen by the dozen cast out from the beach in determined attempts to catch a mess of succulent, firm-fleshed corbina. The usual bait proved ineffective. The fish would not bite at rock worms at all.

Then the fishermen located the sand-crab bed, went out at low tide armed with scrapers and screens, and collected enough of the soft-shelled variety to use as a lure. They hooked corbina immediately—but there arose an unexpected difficulty. Those old pilings were not like the supports of an ordinary wharf. The sharp edges of the great bunches of barnacles and mussels beneath the surface cut their strong casting linen like so much string.

Consequently the submerged part of the pilings became decorated with dozens of hooks, broken lines and surf sinkers, until it was impossible to cast anywhere near the place without entangling and losing the fishing outfit. The corbina seemed to feed only close to the logs. When hooked they would immediately wind the line around the masses of barnacles, and the disgusted fisherman on the beach usually lost his tackle. With casting line at a dollar a spool a trip to the old wharf became an expensive amusement and soon the word was passed around and the place was carefully avoided.

The wise old leader had found the safest refuge the fish had ever known, combining plenty of good food with a means of protection from enemies. In such a favorable environment the corbina thrived and grew enormously, until by fall there were some specimens nosing around the piling that would have

astonished the most experienced of surf fishermen.

In such a perilous element as the ocean this luxurious safety could not last indefinitely. The end of it came suddenly, in a strange manner. For many months a tall wooden derrick had clanked and steamed day and night half a mile below the wharf. One night, with a thundering roar, a big gusher was brought in; it was the beginning of a new oil field. Everything changed on the formerly quiet beach. A forest of oil derricks covered the adjacent low hills; a tank farm, pipe line and refinery added their odors and noise to the din of the field. No legislation against water pollution had yet been passed, and the refuse was piped out into the salt water.

The oil first announced its presence by a few calm, iridescent spots that floated past the wharf. More and more patches appeared, until the entire ocean for a mile on each side of the refinery and a hundred yards out to sea was colored a dirty yellow. In this emulsion few fish could live. Many came in with the tide, were overpowered by the oil and cast up on the beach.

Forced to reach shallow water in order to get their food, the corbina suffered more than any other species. The morning after the spread of the oil, when the leader brought in the school, half were killed before they realized that the yellow water was dangerous and hurried out to sea again. Instead of taking his followers down the coast where the water was clean, the big surf fish lingered near the piling for one more day, and then turned toward the wharf a second time. He was bent upon finding the sand-crab bed that had mysteriously disappeared on the day before. He did not know that the crabs, also, had succumbed to the evil-smelling mixture—there was no bed any more.

Coming in with the rush of an unusually high tide he led his sadly decimated army in search of food. A hundred of the fish had already been killed. Part of those that remained refused to follow him, and turned southward toward Mexico to find a safer feeding ground. Only about forty corbina swam in with the high course.

As they entered the oily back-wash and tried desperately to find the crabs, the smothering oil entered their gills, weakened and finally overpowered them. One by one they turned on their sides and floated up on the beach, where great flocks of screeching gulls put an end to them. The leader, last to feel the effects of the poisonous mixture, crept under the piling into a submarine crevice between two rocks of the granite foundation. Here there was little oil, and the fish gradually revived.

Lurking in this hole, the big corbina remained motionless, trying to regain strength enough for a dash through the breakers to the safety of the sea. All at once he realized that he was not alone. Feeling its way cautiously in the shallowing water, a long bluish shape, the same that had visited the surf earlier in the summer, moved slowly toward his hiding place. Three feet away from the terrified corbina, the visitor from the deep stopped and stared fixedly with a pair of cruel green eyes.

With a twist of its powerful tail it turned on its side and lunged at the fish, displaying a mouth like a long gash, set with rows of needle-like teeth. But the hole was too narrow; it could not reach the imprisoned surf fish.

Observing that its prey was weak and would probably succumb sooner or later, the sea-monster flattened against a granite slab and waited. Meanwhile the tide had started to ebb.

The rock foundation into which the corbina had crept was raised somewhat above the ocean floor. Soon the water level would sink below the crevice, and he would be washed helplessly by the wavelets down into the jaws of the grisly invader of the surf.

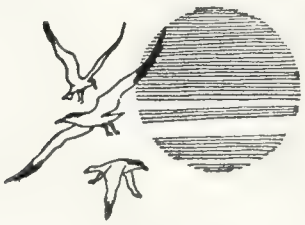
Slowly the water receded until there was barely enough depth in the hole for the corbina to support himself with his big fins. Then something happened.

Beginning to feel the effects of the oil, the sea-monster uneasily shifted its position nearer to the old piling.

As it turned, it crossed a long white line. Two sharp points penetrated its smooth side—pinned it fast. Churning the water in anger and fear, the creature became entangled in another line—then a third fastened two strong hooks in its lashing tail. It was held in half a dozen places by the tackle lost near the wharf. And the line was made of the finest linen strands, unbelievably strong. Hopelessly caught, it could only twist vainly back and forth.

The corbina seemed to realize that his enemy was now unable to harm him. As he had by this time recovered some of his strength, he swam feebly out into deeper water, beyond the oil, and filled his gills with pure salt water again. Then he turned south, away from the danger.

When the tide had gone out, a passing fisherman found a seventy-pound blue shark stranded under the old wharf; the last finny visitor that would investigate the pilings for a long time.



In which KINGSLEY MOSES *introduces*

Boney

I RECKON I know why it is that a man calls another man a jackass when he wants to be real insulting. Some of the other burros with me here certainly are stupid. No sense at all! Why, they even think I'm French and call me "Froggy"—me, whose mother Jinny was of the best Kentucky Blue Grass family. And General Jack, my dad, won thousands of dollars in prizes in the Tennessee county fairs, they say. Though, of course, I never saw him.

Yeh, they are an ignorant lot, the rest of these burros. Know nothin' but how to carry a pack and jam their muzzles into a nose-bag of shelled corn or sheaf oats and bran. Yum! I like that too; but I don't live just to eat like a fool mule or one of those bad-tempered broncs I have to associate with sometimes. I use my head for something besides a rack for a headstall. Up Boise way, for example:

We were packing in a stamp mill outfit to the mining camp where Gil, my man, is the boss. The train was mixed mules and horses. I was the only burro, and Gil and I always went four or five rods ahead of the train.

"I can trust you, Boney, to know your stuff," laughed Gil, slapping me on the neck the way I like to have him do. "But I wouldn't want you to have to associate with those mean mules and dumb hosses back yonder in the echelon there. Roll along, little donkey, roll along!" Which was his way of singing the old cowboy song we'd all heard so often.

"Haw!" said I, not letting out my best big baritone bray. I save that for times when I get real enthusiastic, or when I want to discipline some fool horse that's acting up, kicking or biting—it brings them out of it quick, I can tell you. They're scared of a real he-burro, horses are, even if we're only about a quarter their size.

I looked back at the train, loafing along lazy. They were all there, right enough, with the two men that are Gil's helpers. And as the sun was going down and we were on the top of the mountain's shoulder, I could count almost all of them—nine at least, black and clear against the

bright golden light of the evening with the low clouds already a pale pink. We were nearly home, as I knew, having been over that trail right often. Only the hanging bridge and a mile or two more of high country.

So we came to the bridge across the cañon; only three feet wide and tricky for those that don't know it. It was nothing to me, for I can walk a rail on a right-o'-way; but I figured it might worry the horses, so I wasn't surprized when Gil stopped me, just murmuring, "Ho-up, Boney!" Mean place that bridge, unless you're mighty careful—though of course it's all old stuff to me.

We had to get across some way, just the same. And after Gil had gone back to the other fellows and talked a bit he gave me the "forward" and I stepped out easy and careful, watching my step.

The river is 'way down below, all white and foamy in flood. You can hear the roar of it almost like a railroad train. Some of the horses didn't like it, I can tell you; and I guess the men with Gil didn't care about it so much either, for when I poked my head around to see that everybody was coming all right those two men were hanging on to the handrail and walking as a barefoot boy does when he's trying to cross hot sand. Men are funny that way, aren't they? They'll fight and kill each other without seeming to be bothered or scared a bit, but when it comes to a simple little thing like walking a mountain trail a foot wide, with a sheer cliff rising on one side and a mile drop on the other—why, I've seen some of the best soldiers we had in France get all white and trembly when they came out to our country and tried a mountain pass. Shiver like a nervous collie-dog, they did. Yes, men are funny. All except Gil, of course. He's afraid o' nothing.

It's only about a hundred yards across that ravine, and I was half-way over before I felt the bridge swinging under me. It always swings a little, of course; but this was the most I'd ever felt it, for I'd never been on it with such a big pack train before. Twelve horses and mules there were—and me. Say, it was just then I realized that made thirteen.

Now although I'm not superstitious—except, of course, about black cats crossing your path, or jack rabbits in the road, or white horses and red-haired women, or wall-eyed ponies or cock-eyed men, or three fellows lighting cigarets off one match. And there is that old verse my mother taught me about horse-animals:

> One white leg, inspect him;
> Two white legs, reject him;
> Three white legs, sell him to your foes;
> Four white legs, feed him to the crows!

And a few of those other jinxes we all know are sudden death—I must say I didn't like that "thirteen" thought coming to me right in the middle of a ticklish bridge like that. We old Army veterans come to know about those things, you know, like a soldier's wrapping his puttees inside out—he mustn't change them even if he's going to inspection—or getting the traces on the wrong side.

And still that bridge was swaying something fierce. Yes, I got worried.

Even before Gil yelled I understood what was the matter. Those fool animals back of me were so stupid they didn't know enough to break step crossing a bridge. Is it any wonder some folks call horses "dumb animals!" I'll say they are. There's a lot of stuff written about the intelligence of horses that is just the bunk. Horse sense! Say, even a mule is a heap wiser! And, as you know, the mule is just the big boob stepbrother of a donkey. Horses will run bang-slam into a fire, instead of walking away from it like any reasonable jack. They'll kick their hide off in barbed wire. They'll stampede any time, anywhere, for no reason at all. Dumb-bells! And they put over nothing on me, I can tell you. For all their size and strength, I take no back talk from any of them, crocks or thoroughbreds either. And when it comes to sharpshootin' with my hoofs—Say, I can kick a tin can off a fence post. And that's not boasting either—just listen!

But I was talking about that swaying

bridge, and the animals being so dumb.

Of course, right away, Gil yelled back:

"Break step! Break step, you!"

Fine chance those men back there had to try to make those horses and mules change their lead! The men were at the very end of the procession, 'way behind all the rest. On that narrow bridge it was impossible for them to get up even to where they could speak to the horses.

All the time the bridge swayed worse. Awful it was—out and back, out and back, more and more and more. Even Gil was hanging on to the the handrail now. His face was whiter than I'd seen it in years—since back on the Aisne, in fact, when we lost half our platoon in one shell-burst. As for me, without any hands to hang on with I was having one Hector of a time to keep my balance, what with a hundred and fifty pounds of nuts and screws and bolts and such-like on my back.

"Break step! Break step!" yelled Gil again.

But still they kept wabbling and moving forward. 'Most any second I expected to hear a shout and catch a glimpse from the corner of my eye of some poor devil pitching down to those black humps far below which were the rocks over which the white water ran.

So I saw it was up to me to take charge.

"Haw," says I softlike, sort of clearing my throat.

And then, though it was a mighty ticklish thing to do, I twisted round as far as I could so that I could look at the whole parade. And then in our own horse way I give them:

"Company 'tenshun!" Only I guess what it sounded like was, "Ah-haw; ah-haw; ah-haw!" And followed it up with my best bray—yeh, a good one!

As I did that I showed them what I want. I stop dead and spread my hind feet and fore feet just as wide apart as I could, bracing with all my weight. If they only caught on! And—praise Pegasus!—they got me. One after another they spread their fore legs, then their hind legs. And in not much more than a minute that bridge had stopped swaying.

Gil just looked at me and grinned.

"O. K., old-timer," says he. "That's the cat's pajamas! Now wait a second till I can trickle back there and give those fool horses 'Squads east.' You can take care of yourself, I reckon."

He didn't try to go by me, not wanting to crowd me out from the handrail and not daring to try the outside himself. But, like the athlete he is, he swung down from the rail, pulled himself along swinging hand over hand right over the terrible ravine and so came back to the horses. After that we were sittin' pretty. For when I started off he only lets one animal go past him at a time, and watched darn well that they broke step. Yeh, smart man, my Gil.

THAT'S one reason, I suppose, we always get on so well together, Gil and I. Each of us realizes that the other fellow's pretty smart. And then we've been pardners for a long time, ever since the war.

We just naturally liked each other from the start, ever since I was a dumb little foal in Havver, France, and Gil was what they called a high private in the rear rank.

I've told you I was born in France, at that place by the water the boys called Havver. My ma was in the Regular Army and knew her job fine, carrying coffee and slum up to the soldiers. And they do say that when I was born it was a real sensation. I was the first American born in the A. E. F., Gil always says. Though he laughs when he says it, and that's one joke of his I don't understand. With my folks being from Kentucky and Tennessee I guess I'm a hundred per cent. American as the next one, ain't I?

"Looka this yere reptile we have amongst our midst!" Those were about the first real American words I remember. It was the top sergeant who'd drifted in to visit ma. And right there is where I started loving Gil.

"Reptile, my eye, Sarge!" pipes up Gil, indignant. "You don't know a ——

good little jack when you see one. Back where I come from a foal like that—"

But the sergeant walks out on him, whistling:

> You're in the Army now,
> You're not behind the plow—

Oh, well, you know the rest of that favorite patriotic song of ours. For quite a while I was that green I thought it was the national anthem.

And I'll have to admit that a good many of them did think about me the same way as the sergeant. From the time I could suck on a bottle, an Army canteen with some rubber washers round the nozzle to make it soft enough for my gums, lots of the boys kept kidding me all the time. My ears and my legs, I guess, must have been a sort of off-size. And they thought my color was funny too—a slaty blue, except on my face and belly and the insides of my legs where the fur was gray. If they'd known anything about jacks and jennies they'd have realized that my color was real thoroughbread stuff, all right, all right.

But, all in all, I didn't mind their kidding. For when you got to savvy them real well they were all good boys. Soon as I could use my teeth real good for chewing they kept me mighty well supplied with chow, me not being fussy about just what I eat so long as there's plenty of it. When I couldn't get grass or leaves or twigs I'd just as soon have jam or spuds or condensed milk, and I even found that the adjutant's shoe blacking was mighty sweet to the taste, although a bit sickish when you ate a whole tin of it. Only one thing I drew the line on—saddle soap—bad medicine!

It was when they came to naming me that there was a big row. For a right smart time I felt pretty important, I can tell you. Every one in the outfit had to horn in with suggestions about what I ought to be called. Even the captain and the adjutant made some wise cracks on the question.

We're all real friendly in our company, and the captain has come down to chew his pipe in the barnyard where ma and I have a shed and the men are billeted up in the hay.

"Let's get kinda highbrow, boss," says the looey to the skipper. "Let's call the runt Bottom. That's Shakespeare stuff, you know."

"A Midsummer Night's—bad—Dream, if you should ask me," grins the Old Man. "You've got 'bottoms up' on the brain, what with red ink at one franc fifty a bottle—and you from a prohibition State too. You'd ought to be ashamed. Meself, I'm a very —— religious guy, I am. Why not label him Balaam? That's in the Bible—one of those best-selling books you might've heard of."

"I'd suggest, sir," says Private O'Brady, "that the top-kicker should ought to have the honor of having this for a namesake."

The sergeant himself, naturally, wasn't present at the moment.

The captain answers nothing to that wise crack; but he don't bother hiding a grin when Cohen, the bugler, trumpets—

"What you got against the little donkey, Harp?"

It's then that my man Gil, who's a corporal by now, real high-ranking, shows them all this is no joking matter.

"Did you notice, Cap'n," says he, "that the little jack is just about the color of the French uniform? And being that he was born in Havver he ought to have a real good French name and a military name at that, seein' he's a member of this outfit."

"You tell 'em, Gil. I stutter," says one.

"Vive la francs!" pipes another.

"Gaw' bless our noble Hallies!" sings Cocky, from Liverpool by way of Gowanus, Brooklyn.

"Why not Napoleon Bonaparte?" persists Gil, serious-minded like always.

"And Nap for short?" asks the adjutant.

"Speakin' of the favorite recreation of this outfit—bunk fatigue" comes back the captain, alluding to the fact that sleeping is about the best thing B Company can do.

"No. Boney," answers the adjutant. "He'll answer to that O. K."

"Who's got a bottle to break over his boom?"

"N. Bonaparte B Company, I christen thee!" offers another smart Aleck.

But Boney I am from then on just the same. Gil gets his way as per usual.

NOW about the rest of the war I'm not bothering to talk very much. Before we were finished I was big enough to be doing my own share of the work, with my pack loaded up with tin cans of coffee, and often as not near having my back broken with cartridge cases. We jacks go right into the fight, you know. We don't stay back in echelon with the artillery horses. No, sir; we go up where the stuff comes fiercest. And often and often I was scared—no, not of the rifle bullets; they bother no more than bumble-bees. But, oh boy, when those H. E. shells come rumbling high up in the sky, like a freight train crossing a trestle at about a million miles an hour, and then—*whee-e-e-e*—they are coming down close, too close, and land—*Bang*—WHOOOOM! My hocks, I hate those hell-birds!

But I always followed Gil. And nothing could ever stop him. Daytimes down along the duck-boards in the trenches, with the mud clear up to my belly; night-times through shell-holes and old wire we kept right on with our business. And when one morning, after a bad night, my mother didn't come home and almost the whole company came round and petted me—oh, well, I guessed what must have become of her. I'd seen what had happened to two teams—six horses each with their limbers—when a big shell hit right between them.

For a long time I was mighty lonesome, though Gil slept out in the shed with me on a tarpaulin over some hay.

And one day, just when the sun got high, I heard a whole lot of bugles. And then there was no more firing.

A year and a half later we came home. We'd left our outfit and stayed behind in France, you see. Some way Gil had managed to get discharged over there. And, by jings, he'd got me my discharge too. Some class for a jack, eh! Reconstruction job in the Saar, Gil called what we were doing; he, before the war, having been what they call a mining engineer.

ALL that summer after B Company went home and the next winter we worked there. But when the weather got hot again Gil told me we were going home too, home to America.

My, I was glad! But if I'd known what I had before me—Bots, but that was an awful trip! Days and days in a black stall in the dark with the floor moving up and down and sidewise all the time; just like the swinging bridge I've told you about, only you did know that you couldn't fall off. And then days in a railroad train, with Gil being able to drop in to my box car every so often to talk to me.

But at last we get out here to the mountains and the stamping-mill and the mines. And again Gil and I hit the trail together, for he's what they call a prospector for the company by this time. We're gone for days at a stretch; sometimes up in the high mountains where it's always cool and the wind smells of pine-trees and balsam, and the water in the springs is so icy it makes your nose ache to drink it; sometimes 'way down in the desert where there's nothing but mesquite and greasewood, and hardly any water at all—and what there is tastes funny and flat like the whitewash I'd tasted on the walls of the barnyards in France.

The mountains I like just fine, and Gil likes them too. We have lots of fun mooching along, Gil ahead puffing tobacco smoke, and me behind with my pack of his instruments and ore samples all tidy and firm on my back with a diamond hitch that is always comfortable and yet will slip no more than a double-cinched saddle.

Gil often sings himself a song, soft and contented. Something it is about:

"Smokin' my pipe on the mountings, sniffin' the mornin' cool,
I walks in my old brown gaiters along o' my old brown mule—"

An old artillery song, he says. But he might sing it about a jack or a burro, it seems to me; but some way he never does.

It is the desert we both of us hate. It's cruel going there—hours and hours in the fierce sunshine with the sand soft under your feet, or, worse, the splintery flint rock as sharp as broken glass to your hoofs. And very stupid and uninteresting. No other animals at all, hardly even a coyote 'way off in the distance, or once in a while, a-sailing round in a circle, a big bird Gil calls a buzzard. Lizards are the only moving things; and every so often—ugh!—a brown and white thing called a rattler. Gosh, how I hate 'em! Though generally Gil will fix those snakes with his six-gun. Bang! Some dust, and then that snake is crushed and quiet. For the most of the time we shove on, always moving along pretty steady. Gil, as men go, isn't big. I'm not either. But us runts are there with the endurance. And Gil was as strong as a big man—and braver, and I'll carry as much as a big overgrown horse any day—and farther. And not be all the time blattin' about food and water either. A good soldier always carries on. Gil and I take a whole lot of stopping.

Black Mac found that out, believe me!

IT WAS in the very worst desert country we met him, that country where it's not all sand but where great piles of rock rise up from the flint and black stuff called lava. Sometimes they are just single rocks like chimneys and more often they're like the ruins of stone houses. When first I came into that country I thought I was back in France, or in some place, anyway, where there'd been a powerful lot of fighting. For those rocky piles in the desert were mighty much like the devastated towns we'd seen in wartime, just messes of rubbish. That's one time I wished I could talk, to ask Gil all about it. But after a while it was clear that whoever had shelled that desert land must have shot it up a long time ago, for there was not a thing left but rocks—no clothes or furniture or burned wood or glass or white, dry bones of animals.

Gil had had the same ideas as I had sometimes, I came to guess. For once he said to me:

"It does look like France—or hell—doesn't it, Boney!" And he shook his head thoughtful. "Does look like the Almighty's artillery had put down a pretty sweet barrage one time. Demolition—I'll say they did it!"

It was here we run into Black Mac, after a hard and busy day's working. Not that we'd made any powerful distance between the cool time before sun-up and the dark of the evening, for Gil had seemed mighty excited about something or other, and every few paces he'd stop, use his pick a while till he had a lot of stones smashed loose and then pound up the loose rock with his hammer. I guessed he'd found something big. For often he'd talk to himself and once in a while to me even.

"A pocket, maybe—maybe more. Rich stuff, I'll tell you, Boney! Pretty, powerful pretty, and if it's a lode—oh, lady!"

Running on that way, he was, till dark. He never let up till he couldn't see at all. And then we camped where we were.

A scary sort of place it was, what with those rocks standing up like tombstones. Some of the rocks were real tall like broken steeples of churches, and others were in queer, ugly shapes—you'd imagine you saw things in their outlines. And even when it was full dark and the stars were out by millions those rocks were distinct and black against the deep blue of the night sky.

There had been not a stick or scrap of wood for cooking. But Gil always traveled with everything he'd need in a pinch, and now he had a tin can of fire in my pack. Wonderful stuff! I never felt the heat at all, but just strike a match to it and it burned blue and pretty. He cooked him some coffee and bacon, gave me my nose-bag of oats with plenty of bran, and he was so tired that after a pipe he curled up right there where he sat, just pulling his poncho across him.

I'd been drowsing all through my own dinner—was fast asleep, in fact, when Gil had come to unbuckle my nose-bag; and dropped off right away afterward. But I always sleep light, of course, and as soon as Black Mac came near I must have smelled him, even sleeping.

"Haw!" said I, real loud, and let out my best old bray.

I saw Gil's hand go to his gun, even before he was full awake. And the stranger out there in the dark where the shadow of the tip-tilted rocks falls heaviest must have seen the motion too, for his own hand dropped to his hip. Then he stopped where he was. And his own right hand comes up empty. I can see in the dark, pretty well. He had no gun, that was the answer.

Then—

"Hello, pardner!" the stranger hailed.

Gil laughed at that.

"Sort of startled me," he gave him back. "Come on me kind of sudden."

"Seen your fire flicker," explained the big fellow, moving forward though it's still too dark to see him well, "and it sure was a pretty sight to me," he runs on. "I made the best time I could comin' over, but—"

I got wise then that he was having some trouble walking.

"In trouble?" asks Gil.

"Right hungry, yeh."

"Can fix that pretty quick." While he spoke Gil was getting the fire-can out; lighting it.

In the blue flame of the fire-can I saw the man's face. And I certainly didn't like it. You've seen a cat when she's angry, with her ears laid back flat and her eyes narrowed and that fierce killer look on her face. This man had that look right now, for all he was trying to be friendly. I could feel it more than see it maybe, though he had got his neck pulled in and all his muscles stiff as if ready to spring, and his eyes, yellow in the firelight, watched every smallest movement of Gil's hands. A man who walked alone, like all the cats, I guessed. Bad clear through and maybe mighty dangerous.

It was well he wasn't armed. He had, in fact, when I looked him over, nothing at all with him but the few clothes he wore and an old cloth-covered canteen—no gun, pick, spade, compass, field-glasses. His clothes were shirt and pants and a worn-out pair of moccasins. No socks. And he was thin as the starved alley-cat he looked like.

Water he had, he said. But food he'd not had for some time by the way he got his yellow teeth into the beans and bread-crust Gil gave him. Between mouthfuls he allowed that his rations had given out. We were only two or three days from human beings so I couldn't figure why he hadn't beat it for civilized country where he could feed himself. He wasn't lost, for he admitted that much in talking with Gil. Said he knew just where he was.

"Well, that's more than I do, friend," says Gil, grinning. "You'll save me some time tomorrow by knowing that. I figured I'd have to do a resection tomorrow to get myself oriented, having run round in circles so much the last few days."

"Oh, I'll show you all right," says the stranger. "If you got a map I can put a pin on the place we are."

"You know how much this country's mapped—not at all," Gil looked at him. "Government never thought it worth bothering with."

"That's so—just us fool wildcats wander here." He meant wildcat prospector, of course; but feeling about him like I did the description of himself made me twitch my tail uneasy.

"Oh, I'm not a wildcat," Gil admits. "I work for Pacific Placer."

"They got claims here?"

"Sure, got a concession for the whole county and then some—why?"

And I saw that the stranger's hand had dropped again to his leg, where once his gun might've swung.

"Nothing," is the answer, as the black fellow jerks up his head which keeps dropping on his chest like a man's will when he's dead for sleep. "Oh, nothing."

And without another word he stretches out on the ground and is snoring.

Gil dropped off in a minute too, but I stayed awake a while to watch. Nothing happened, so pretty quick I decided I was getting as bad as one of those fool horses worrying about something that isn't so.

The sun is taking a peek over the mesa to the east when I come to. Tired I must have been. The stranger is still asleep; but Gil's no fellow to waste the whole day dozing. Already he's got out all his surveying stuff—I know all their names because when Gil puts them away in my pack, one by one, he often repeats them to me. There's the plane table, a big board which can be screwed on to a three-legged stand; the drawing paper that goes on the board; the alidade for ruling and measuring and taking sights; triangles, protractors, compass and the rest.

I moseyed over to say "howdy" and take a look at what he was doing, rubbing my nose on his flannel shirt shoulder as usual. He fishes up a lump of sugar from his pocket, but goes right on with his measuring, but talking to me and himself as he often does:

"Guess I can do a three-point resection," he mumbles. "Providing I can get the three points, that is. Let's see—where the sun rises—yeh, can dope that out all right from my tables. And north, if this —— compass hasn't gone crazy like it does sometimes. And Skeleton Peak—now which in heck is Skeleton—oh, yeh—" and he waves his hand off toward the northwest toward one mountain in the range that has a bulging, rounded top like a skull.

The stranger had waked up by this time and was watching us. He looked just as mean and tricky this morning as he looked last night. But the food and sleep had perked him up quite a bit.

"Locatin' yourself?" said he. "No use to take all that bother. I could've told you."

"No bother. I got to fix this place right," said Gil.

"So's to report to your company?" The man's nose wrinkled, kind of sneering.

Gil only said yes.

But in a minute he asked—

"That's Skeleton Peak, isn't it?"

The stranger gets up and comes round behind him to see just where he's pointing.

"No, no," he corrects him. "You're way too far north. There she is, the big fellow down yonder with the white slashes down her side—see?"

"By jings!" puzzled Gil. "You sure?"

"I'd ought to know this country. Been working here for more'n a—" He seemed to sort of catch himself then. "Well," he goes on, smooth and purry-like. "What's the use of my trying to fool you? Naturally, you know I'm prospectin'. Got so plumb keen over some things I found a few days ago—and I guess you've found something too, seein' how interested you are in locatin' yourself—that I hung round here till my victuals give out, and I even cached my gun and pack so's I could travel faster and easier."

Gil went on with his work, drawing lines here and there, measuring very careful. The board called the plane table was on its three-legged stand, set very low and firm on the ground, and his hand moved across the board methodical and steady.

I was wandering about, doing nothing in particular except wishing Gil would get his drawing done and start getting us breakfast. But I did keep my eye on the cat-faced stranger. I certainly didn't take to his sneaking, slinky ways, or to the look in his eyes either. And pretty soon he took and sat himself down right across that drawing-board from Gil, right close up to him. I ambled back, at that, to find out what devilment this guy might be up to. I got it quick too.

"I'd kind o' thought this was my pickin's, pardner," the stranger was murmuring to Gil. "I found it first, you know."

Gil looked up at this, mighty quick.

"I got to make my report," he said. Then, "Oh, by the way, are you sure that is Skeleton Peak? If it is I'm near ten miles out of the way by my calculations."

"Sure," is the answer. "I ought to know."'

They say nothing more for a minute or two. Then the stranger starts talking again; but so low I can't hear what he's saying.

It was mighty easy to guess, just the same. He and Gil had both found something good—from their way of looking at it, at least. And this bird didn't intend to give up without an argument. The bones of many a man who didn't die of thirst or hunger either are lying on the desert because of just such an argument as this. Don't I know it!

The fellow talked, waving his hands and showing his teeth. But Gil just stuck to his work, and once in a while he shook his head and said, "No."

But something got under Gil's skin at last. He had seen that the other fellow wasn't heeled and wasn't worried any himself. But now, abrupt and decided, he looked up.

"No!" he snaps. "Mr. Black Mac—I've got you spotted now, and you're wanted in two or three States if not in this one. No, I will not double-cross my company. So long as I'm taking their pay I'm true to their trust. Go back to your own diggin's and get what you can out of it. I have my report to make." And with that he pulls his six-gun from its holster and lays it on the plane table beside his right hand.

He looked at this Black Mac steady as the fellow rises to his feet.

"Now I've fed you," he says. "And you can have a couple o' cans of beans from the burro's pack yonder. But that's all the dealings I'll have with you."

"Agh!" snarled the fellow. "And you'll be telling the first deputy you meet that you've seen me?"

"No," denied Gil, quiet. "Now—git!"

The bad man backed up a step or two, dropping his hand careless-like into the open front of his shirt. His shirt was so tight on his body that there'd have been a bulge in it if he were packing a gun. Besides, if he'd had a gun he'd have used it long before, if I'm any judge of humans. No, he only stood there sneering, his lips pulled back over pale gums and his eyes narrowed.

"And if I don't—git, mister?" said he mighty threatening.

"Then, this—" Gil's hand slid over easy until it lies on the drawing board touchin' the butt of the gun. "It'll be a nuisance, but I'll have to take you in with me. They'll be glad to see you in, say, Ogden."

Anybody knows a cat moves quick. Is it any wonder I thought this fellow had cat blood? For that bowie knife was out before I saw it. Just a streak of light it seemed.

And Gil's right hand was spiked to the drawing-board, with that long knife quivering in it.

It was an awful thing to see. And for a second Gil just sat looking at his hand helpless. It takes a bit of a moment for a cut with real sharp steel to begin to hurt, you know. And as Gil sat and looked at that hand of his spread on the board, with the knife driven clear through it, Black Mac moved forward grinning.

Before Gil can get over his surprize and the pain that has suddenly stung him, and try to get to his gun with his left hand the fellow reaches down and takes the gun himself, twirling it on his finger by the trigger guard.

"Well, friend," he jeers, "now we won't even have to go halvers. Ain't nobody likely to be lookin' for you right quick, is they? And if they do it'll be one —— of a job to find you. I see you've got a spade in your burro's pack. Right thoughtful of you to bring it! No—let that knife alone!"—Gil had reached over with his left hand to try to yank the knife free—

"It ain't goin' to hurt you much longer."

This all had happened so fast I hadn't moved from my hoof prints. But I'll never forget the scene there—never so long as I'm living. The sun's up now and the whole desert is bright and shining. But the shadow of a big slab of rock fell

about the two men, in the shape of a black oblong. Ugh—I seen plenty of coffins!

Black Mac is standing there, bent in at the belly, crouching, the gun pointed straight at Gil from the level of his belt. In a second that gun would fire. And Gil—my man Gil!—sitting there, with that hand spread out wide on the white paper of the plane table! And now there's dark red on the paper too. He couldn't move from the spot. Pinned down, like rabbits I've seen in a steel trap.

They had both forgotten me. The killer was just playing with poor Gil, waiting to see him crumple and begin begging. And Gil sat there, jaw tight, trying to bear the pain of that knife thrust.

And right then a memory came to me from the old days of the artillery. Queer how often, at the worst times, a fellow thinks of something ridiculous.

One of the artillery orders is "Action rear!"

I did so. And with both hind hoofs I lashed out, high and hard as I could.

And that gun sailed away a-flyin'. I'd kicked it clear out of Mac's hand. Then I landed two more wallops on his body. He keels over cold—helpless. I smashed plenty of ribs, I reckon.

YEH, that's the end of the story. Gil pulls the knife out, of course, before the devil on the ground can come to. Then, first gathering up the gun and making sure that it would still fire, he tied his hand up with some bandages from the first-aid kit.

I wanted Gil to go right on south with me to the nearest place we could get a doctor. But, no, I couldn't make him understand me. And what do you think he did? Piled that big, black bum on my back and made me carry him—me, that would've liked to kick his face in—all the way back to a ranch-house. I know now why Gil's called a human being. But, believe me, such kindness is too deep for a burro to figure.

Is that why they call me a jackass?

Dandyfunk

By NORMAN SPRINGER

THE art of dandy funk making, like rope-mat making and building clipper ship models in small-necked bottles and fashioning walking sticks out of sharks' backbones, is nowadays a lost and forgotten art at sea. It went out with the sailing ship. But in its day—and it was a long, long hungry day—dandyfunk was a flourishing and honored institution.

I once served in a ship where dandyfunk reigned in the barren diet. She was an English "whack" ship. That is, she issued the bare legal rations to the men. Included in each man's daily whack were eight large, round, adamantine sea biscuits. This hardtack was our salvation—and the foundations of all our dandyfunks.

When a man had accumulated the materials for a dandyfunk—by actual self-denial at dinner, the one stout meal of the day, or by lucky filching of cabin tidbits when the cook's back was turned—he placed a number of pieces of hardtack in his dandyfunk bag. He placed it upon the iron anchor stock and belabored it with a club, an oaken belaying pin or, better still, a heavy sheet pin. The violent assault pulverized the imprisoned biscuits. The smaller the crumbs the better the dandyfunk. I've known an old, thorough sailor to spend hours of his watch below pounding his dandyfunk bag. We boys with sound teeth and cast-iron stomachs were less particular.

Anybody could pound a dandyfunk bag but it took an artist to complete the dish. In the old days a good dandyfunk mixer was an honored person in a hungry hooker's forecastle. Our star was Old Donald.

Old Donald, like any artist, had decided opinions about his art. He would never, for instance, mix a dandyfunk upon a washed plate. He never washed his own plate, and it would have taken a geologist to decide which was metal and which was crust. Old Donald said that thus he got the flavor of all past meals into his dandyfunk.

The dandyfunk bag emptied into the plate, Old Donald added water—not too much, not too little—to the heap of crumbs. After careful stirring with a tarry forefinger, the other ingredients were added—and they consisted of everything a hungry man could lay hands upon that looked at all edible. But now came the line of demarcation between dandyfunk and cracker hash. Anybody could make the latter.

But into the dandyfunk went skill—and a little sugar and a dash of salt and scraps of junk from dinner and a gob of marmalade from the precious store in the tin can on the top shelf of the locker and a wedge, perhaps, of rubbery "burgo" set aside at breakfast and as much blackstrap molasses as the "whack" afforded. And, most important and most difficult to work into the mess, a large amount of tried-out salt junk fat from the cook's barrel. Mixing completed, the dish was popped into the galley oven to bake or, at least, warm up for supper. Afternoon use of the galley stove for dandyfunk baking was the forecastle's traditional right.

Of course, it couldn't be made every day. The larder wouldn't stand it. The hardtack we had always with us, but it took time to accumulate the rest of a good dandyfunk. Once or twice a week we tasted that candy-sweet, greasy, lead-heavy sailors' delight. A dandyfunk supper—ah, it was something to remember and dream over.

HUGH PENDEXTER

Gives us more of

His Serial of America

The

I WAS a woods scout, but was working for Forbes' expedition against Fort Duquesne that day in May, 1758, when I came to Shippensburg with Ensign Petny, my successful rival for the affection of Elizabeth Joy; Richard Arlington, an Old England man; Giga-tsuhli—Bloody-Mouth in English—my Cherokee friend; two soldiers; and Sergeant Fincer, whom I suspected of being a spy. I was to find out who was giving information to the French, and also what had become of the papers William Samp was carrying when he was killed.

That night Arlington and I heard Fincer, drunk, singing a French song. I told Petny about it, and he thrashed the man.

"He picked up that foolishness before the war, working for French traders," Petny told us.

I searched the drunkard while he slept. He carried no stolen papers.

At Chambers' Fort Giga-tsuhli and I heard the same French song, and a shot was fired at us. We captured one of the Fairden brothers of Path Valley, whom we had suspected of having dealings with Fincer.

The next day we left the party and scouted up Path Valley, taking with us our prisoner and Old Gormet, a settler who insisted on accompanying us. In the valley we saw the two other Fairden brothers murdered by a band of Indians with a French leader. We harried the band, picking off several of the Indians. Then, leaving Gormet and Fairden, we hastened to warn the Beverlys, a peaceful family whom Phindry, a witch-doctor, had lured to the valley with the promise of hidden gold. With the Beverlys were Arlington, who had joined them at the fort, and mad Mercy, Mrs. Beverly's sister, with a mania against all Indians. Ann Beverly would not listen to my warnings, so overcome was she at the death of the Fairdens.

"You stood by and saw them killed!" she cried. "God help Forbes' army if all in it are like you, and look and run away!"

"The Fighting Years," copyright, 1927, by Hugh Pendexter.

Fighting Years

I SAW her mother emerge from the cabin. I saw the girl catch her by the shoulder and turn her back. After they passed through the doorway the figure of Mercy was framed in the opening, and she held in her hand what I took to be an ax.

To the two men I bitterly complained:

"She blames me for not attempting the impossible. A company of riflemen could not have saved them once the Indians reached the clearing and began talking with them."

"If it was all over before you knew what was up—" murmured Arlington. "Still, you must have known from the start they were hostile savages."

"——! You too sitting in judgment?"

"No, no, Mr. Nolton. There may be some circumstances you haven't told," he politely replied. But I knew that in his ignorance of border fighting he was sharing in the girl's condemnation of me.

"Very well, know all the circumstances now." And I briefly sketched the climax, wherein the Fairden man thrust an ax in a savage's hand and bowed his head and invited the mortal blow.

"That makes it a bit different," he decided. "Perhaps I can persuade Miss Ann to feel more considerate toward you."

"You're not to take that bother," I told him. "Miss Ann is old and wise enough to do her own thinking; and I'm not making any defense of what I did or failed to do. I've told you so you might realize something of the ferocious nature of the bloody devils. Even the Frenchman had no control over them."

"Nolton's right. He can do his own talking. Ann's stirred up enough without telling her more horrible details," shortly remarked Phindry.

"You can't have objections to our talking a bit," said Arlington, and the supercilious smile he directed at the witch-doctor told me there was scant friendship between the two. Then to me, "I believe you acted wisely, Nolton. No one could suspect the savages would kill."

"I believed they were friendly to the Fairdens. But they had their hoops ready for stretching the scalps."

"Well, well! Such a wild country! I was inclined to blame you for not striking a blow. Your explanation has wiped that out of my mind."

"To —— with your blame or praise," I told him. "Get out of Path Valley if you want to keep your hair out of a hoop."

"If I have a weapon when attacked or when my friends are attacked I shall give them a fight, Mr. Nolton," he gravely retorted. And with a curt bow he leisurely walked toward the cabin.

"Just like an Old England man! Comes over here and begins to criticise our men of the frontier," sneered Phindry. "If I'd had my say he'd never come along with

us. I can't understand why Michael Beverly took such a notion to him. They are as far apart in thought as Beaver Town and Philadelphia."

"I was angry and spoke hastily to him. I should have remembered he isn't used to life on the frontier. And it was natural for him to blame me after hearing Miss Ann's talk."

"Women are always unreasonable," Phindry reminded. "But Ann's mighty sensible. Your occupation is to blame for her state of mind. You're a fighting man, a scout for Forbes. She thinks you always should be fighting, no matter what the odds are against you." Then with an air of complacency he informed me:

"Of course I'm different from you. I'm a man of peace. But I'm different from men like the Fairdens in this particular; I *am* safe with the savages; the Fairdens *thought* they were safe. I possess white magic. Had I been there I could have saved those two men, but never by fighting. Some women fall in love with a soldier's uniform because the scarlet trimmings and bright buttons stand for fighting. Women prefer to be saved by fighting rather than by quiet, peaceful means. Of course I realize those poor old fools never had a chance. But if I told Ann that she'd think I was trying to say a good word for you and that would make her more set than ever."

"I've already said I want no defense made for me by any one to any one."

"Exactly. Very wise, too. That man Arlington airs too many ideas. You'd think every man from England is a King George by the way some folks will hark to him."

"The Beverlys like him."

"Aye. Or he'd never have seen this valley in my company. In some ways Michael doesn't have much backbone."

"Just where is he now? He shouldn't be wandering far."

"Hunting. Time he came in. If I'd known the savages were in the valley I'd have gone in his place. You'll be returning to Chambers' Fort. Would you mind taking Arlington with you?"

"I'm not returning to the fort and I'll not take that Englishman anywhere. Even if I wanted to he would refuse to go with me," I replied.

His expression was moody as he nodded and remarked:

"Can't blame you for not liking his company. He can fool women— Well, I must leave you. Some other time, when Ann's in a better frame of mind, I'm sure you'd be welcome."

"Meaning I'm not welcome now?"

He turned and looked at the cabin for an answer. None of the four inmates were in sight.

I returned to my errand, and told him:

"I'm surprized you brought the Beverlys here. I'm amazed at your talk about being safe with French savages. None of the people in that cabin will be safe a second if the savages come."

"And I say my cabin will never be harmed by French or English savages," he warmly retorted.

" 'My' cabin? Who heads the cabin, you or Beverly?"

"Oh, it's their cabin. First owner was killed in a raid after Braddock was licked. Now it's Beverly's."

"It's a trap," I insisted. "It's left standing as a trap. You've led the Beverlys into it. The Indians will surely pay it a visit. And they'll burn it."

"Not so," he cried. "They won't trouble us. And we shan't be here but a short time. But I'm not responsible for what happens to Arlington."

I grunted derisively and observed—

"Safe for three helpless women, but not for an able-bodied man!"

His eyes were ugly as he warned:

"Mister Nolton, I don't like your tone. I don't like your talk. You feel hurt by the way Ann looks at things. I'm not to blame for that. I can protect the Beverlys from all harm. I can't protect Arlington. As soon as Michael gets what he came for we shall go back to the Conococheague, and then on to Philadelphia."

"You actually expect me to believe that there's treasure buried in this lonely

valley and that you can find it?" I demanded.

He waved his hands, and the gesture was reminiscent of something I could almost recall; and he suavely replied:

"What can it matter to me what you believe? Conjuring and divination are sealed books to you. Your mind is completely matter of fact. Yet I've found more truth in my strange power than you ever have, or will, learn. See how poorly you reason. You believed the poor Fairdens were spies for the French. I learned that from your capture of John Fairden and from what Ensign Petny told me at Loudon. I could have told you they were three simple-minded men with much faith. But faith without works amounts to nothing. They thought they were safe. I *know* I'm safe. I do not hate the Indian because I'm not afraid of him. Yet he is afraid of me and my strange power and doesn't dare to lift a hand against me. You fight and kill Indians, but they're not afraid of you."

Our talk was traveling in circles. He disliked the idea of my visiting the cabin. The lack of a welcome on the part of the Beverlys did not displease him. He resented Arlington's presence. I believe he was jealous of the Old England man's captivating manners and smooth speech.

I was remembering Old Gormet's offer to give me a new gun if Phindry didn't marry the girl. She had accused me of cowardice and my weather-toughened face still burned. Despite everything I washed my mind clean of all excepting one belief: She was in deadly peril if she remained in the valley. It was nothing to me whom she liked or disliked, although I could not conceive of any woman's hesitating in choosing Arlington over Phindry.

Thus, because in frontier exigencies there should be no room for pride, I suddenly decided—

"I'll say howdy to Mrs. Beverly and be going."

"Another time—" he began.

"No. Now."

And I started toward the cabin and felt unseen eyes watching my approach.

When I was some twenty feet from the door Mrs. Beverly hurried forth to meet me, and her haste suggested an intention to bar my approach. The mad face of the woman Mercy suddenly was framed in the small glassless window. Her lips were parted in that peculiar fixed smile and her gaze was as steady and unflickering as if her eyes were painted pebbles. Neither the girl nor Arlington were in sight.

Mrs. Beverly had no greeting for me. She came to a halt with her hands on her hips. Her comely face was drawn down in harsh lines. She abruptly began, her voice husky from suppressed emotion:

"Ann's been telling me all about it. You've no need to come here. She's fair upset. She says you see the Injuns kill those poor men and never even said 'boo'."

I took advantage of her love for talk and quickly managed to explain what the daughter had refused to hear. As I talked her honest features relaxed. She had confronted me with a fixed purpose of hostility, but doubts were breaking up that purpose. When I had finished describing the double murder she bruskly commanded:

"Ann, you march out here! Mister Nolton never had a chance to save 'em."

The girl, flushed of face, her eyes humid from weeping, dutifully obeyed and stood behind her mother.

Arlington came as far as the door, where he leaned against the logs and whittled a stick with a small pocket-knife. Waving a hand to me he cheerfully called out:

"Obeyed orders. Haven't told her anything you said to me."

The girl's face flushed hotly on hearing this, but her dark eyes stared at me blankly as if not beholding me. Talking over her shoulder, Mrs. Beverly garrulously repeated what I had told her. In concluding she said:

"You see he'n' that Cherokee Injun s'posed the Fairdens and them bloody

devils were good friends. When the oldest brother poked an ax into a red devil's hand and begged him to strike, of course the redskin cracked him a mortal blow. It was all ended quicker'n scat. They made short work of t'other brother."

"I apologize, Nolton, for not disobeying orders and repeating what you told me," broke in Arlington.

"The two were doomed the second the French and Indians entered the clearing. The hoops were ready for the scalps. But we did not know it till it was over," I repeated. "I've tried to make all this clear so as to get a chance to urge you all to leave the valley at once."

"I ain't blaming Mister Nolton no more," said Ann. "Of course he had no call to throw his life away. That couldn't bring the dead back to life. I was upset. All I could think of was that the Injuns ought to suffer."

"Kill 'em! Kill 'em!" rapidly shrieked Mercy from the window.

"You behave, Mercy!" warned Mrs. Beverly over her shoulder. "Come inside, Mister Nolton. Mike's the one to talk to when it comes to leaving the valley."

"I must be going to find my friend the Cherokee. As to scalps, Miss Ann, the score is even. Old Gormet killed a man the Cherokee and I were trailing up the ridge. Then the Cherokee killed one at the creek near their camp."

"Good! Good! Kill 'em!" screamed Mercy at the window, but with no change in her facial expression.

Now I was in for another recital.

The girl's face revealed an awakened interest. Phindry, back of me, muttered something under his breath. Arlington put up his toy knife and came nearer. Mrs. Beverly's eyes snapped with eager anticipation.

Again she urged me to enter the cabin. I refused and told my story.

Of course Old Gormet and the Cherokee were the heroes, and I endeavored to make it plain that they were entitled to the credit. But my audience gave no heed to my disclaimers.

Mrs. Beverly cried:

"That's the best hearing in a long time! I wish the good Lord had seen fit to let you kill all of 'em!"

"You won't mind anything I've said, will you?" asked the girl eagerly.

"Not a bit." Then I wheeled on Phindry and asked, "Doesn't it make any difference to you now you know two of the savages have been killed?"

He frowned, shook his head and answered:

"It makes no difference as to the safety of the Beverlys. But it means a horrible death for you and Arlington if you are ever caught. It means the same to any one outside my protection. I'm going to surprize all of you, perhaps, when I say I'm sorry Nolton and his friends took those two scalps."

"I bless the fact all my life!" cried Mrs. Beverly.

"But listen," pleaded Phindry. "Hear why I am sorry. It's terrible about the Fairdens, but I insist it helps none that those two savages were killed. Their death only means the savages will return stronger than ever and more determined than ever to raid and burn. As a result of last year's council at Easton we were practically assured of peace on this frontier. Now the savages will try to even the score, frontiersmen will strike back and the killings will close this country to settlers for years."

"You're forgetting that the dead Indians are from the Far Tribes and that the Ohio and eastern Delawares, Shawnees and southern tribes will be glad they are killed," I reminded.

"That's a short-sighted view to take," he answered, but offering nothing to substantiate his assertion. As if to leave the subject he hurriedly told Mrs. Beverly "Whatever happens, ma'am, we'll be safe long enough to get what we came for."

"Kill! Kill! Kill!" chanted the woman at the window.

"Mercy, you be good!" commanded Mrs. Beverly. "Well, Doctor, I'll warrant my man will be mighty fretful if that dream don't turn up something."

"A dream can be spoiled by talking about it," warned Phindry, with a side glance at me.

Arlington was smiling as if much amused.

"Bosh and nonsense!" Mrs. Beverly spiritedly exclaimed. "The stuff is there or it ain't. You've hexed the exact spot or you ain't. Michael has found the place or he ain't. If the stuff's real it can't sprout wings and fly away because some one speaks about that dream."

Arlington came closer and amiably inquired—

"You had a dream about treasure, Doctor?"

"My powers, in what might be called a dream, showed me where something can be found."

"Gold and silver," complacently amplified Mrs. Beverly.

"It should not be talked about before an unbeliever," sternly reminded Phindry.

"So long as you believe it I'd say that was enough," said Mrs. Beverly. "I never thought Ann was keen to believe it. But seeing will be believing."

Arlington chuckled and remarked—

"Even Mrs. Beverly appears to be sceptical."

I stared at Phindry and was unable to decide whether he was a victim of delusions or was playing a part. There was no point, so far as I could discover, in the latter assumption. The fact that Michael Beverly had been sent out on the fool's errand seemed to warrant the belief that Phindry was mentally unhinged.

I shifted my gaze to Ann. She was gazing somberly at the witch-doctor.

Mercy now claimed our attention by screaming:

"Kill every one of 'em! Kill 'em all!"

"Mercy, you git away from that winder!" cried Mrs. Beverly as she turned to enter the house. "I know you got the ax hid in your skirt. You drop it! Don't you go to striking it into things. There ain't no Injuns near here."

She began to run. Mercy disappeared from the window to use the ax on the rude furnishings. At the sound of the chopping blows mingled with the wild yells of the unfortunate, both Arlington and I started for the door.

But Ann held us back, crying:

"Don't go in! Mother alone can quiet her. She hasn't been this bad for months."

Wherewith she hastened after her mother.

I told Arlington:

"You and the Beverlys are in great danger here. Tell them good-by for me."

And I walked toward the north end of the narrow meadow.

"Good luck, Nolton. Hope to see you soon," the Old England man called after me.

I heard a woman's voice calling from the cabin but did not understand the words. Nor did I look about. I had explained the Fairdens' deaths twice before regaining a place of esteem in the minds of the Beverly women and I was weary of talking. I heard soft steps, but did not look around. I was chagrined to find it was Phindry who had followed me.

"You walk with a masterly long stride, Nolton," he informed me.

"My business is done here. If harm comes to any in that cabin their blood be on your head."

"I'll answer for the safety of all but that Arlington. His blood won't hurt my head any. He knows I was opposed to his coming. I ran after you to urge you to take John Fairden back to Chambers' Fort at once."

"My work here seems to be ended," I conceded, although I had no intention of leaving the valley until I had scouted north far enough to know the Beverlys were in no immediate danger. "Old Gormet probably is well on his way to east by this time and is taking Fairden with him."

"You should be with him to explain to Petny how foolish your suspicions were."

He angered me but I retained an appearance of composure and said:

"I take my own time on a scout. I'm my own master out here. I may come

down here again before quitting the valley. I shall hope to find the cabin empty and all you folks returned to the Conococheague."

"You're always welcome so far as I'm concerned," he heartily assured me. "No one can ever tell how a woman will act up. Don't fetch that Cherokee with you. Mercy will brain him if she gets the chance. I won't go any farther. Keep your hair on your head. Wish you could have taken Arlington away. I haven't enough white wampum to cover him."

"You've been among Indians at some time?"

"No. But I possess a strange power, and no Indian will ever seek to harm me."

I grinned sceptically. He frowned, and with a nod of the head turned back while I kept on and entered the growth.

ONCE alone, I discovered I was carrying many disagreeable thoughts in my head. Foremost was the realization that there was no lure east of the mountains. Never again could I look ahead to meeting Elizabeth Joy. What had been my solace on many a mile of lonely prowling was now a blank.

And I felt a great fear for the Beverlys. I visualized the cabin as a trap set with cruel teeth for all who entered the low doorway. I fear I was jealous of the readiness with which Arlington had been received and made to feel at home. It was recurrent, also, in my mind that Old Gormet was to give me a new gun if Phindry did not marry the Beverly girl.

It would be nothing to me whom she married except that I would feel sorry to learn she had been cheated. This is what I earnestly told myself as I swung along the narrow path. I know now I did not like to think of Ann Beverly's being wooed by the Old England man. Perhaps I tried to disguise it by telling myself she was of the frontier and knew no other life, while for Arlington the frontier was merely an experience, a little eccentric patch of crude life. Doubtless it would be better for her to marry him even though he took her back to the Old Country where she would find life more lonesome and distressing than in our isolated valleys. Where Phindry might take her, did he succeed, only God—and perhaps the devil—knew.

The more I allowed my thoughts to pursue this line the more I was convinced Ann Beverly had not had a fair chance. She was young and made for happiness. Youth is fleeting. Where was the door

through which happiness could enter? Arlington, very probably. Phindry, never. I scarcely knew the girl, but I was jealous of Arlington's genius for fitting in with whatever company he might overtake on life's path. His ease, his composure, his gracious manners, his knowledge of a life I could only guess at, all stamped him as my superior. That was the fact I resented, even while irritated at my inclination to like the fellow.

Hurrying on to find my red friend, I gave but little heed to woodcraft as I moodily reviewed my own great disappointment and brooded over the troubles of others. In the back of my head undoubtedly was the reassuring reminder that the Cherokee was between me and danger. The Beverly girl had been quick to set me down as a coward. That had hurt me cruelly. The fact that she had revised her opinion helped none. I had been compelled to offer proofs.

"White or red? Quick!" bellowed a voice a short distance ahead.

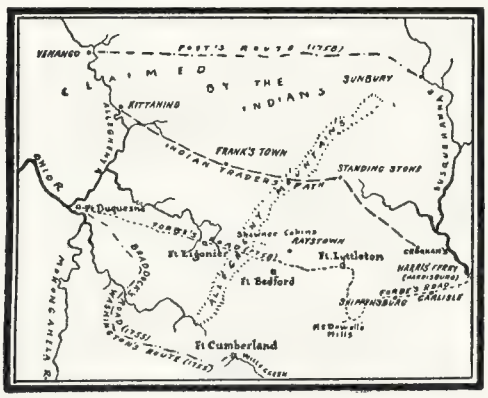
"White. Who are you? Where are you?"

"At the right of the trail. Treed."

"I'm taking the left. Keep covered."

I slipped from the path and worked forward to attack the white man's enemy on the flank. Any man on the frontier was always ready to risk life to help a man in trouble. Ann Beverly might have thought I was trying to atone for not getting killed when the Fairdens were murdered.

Before I could indulge in more nonsense



of this kind the voice of Giga-tsuhli was calling to me:

"Let my white brother tell the white man your red brother is his friend."

"Keep covered!" I called back in his own tongue. Then to the hidden white man, "Don't shoot. The Indian is my friend."

"By ——! That don't make him my friend. By ——! That don't wash! You've got me between you, but Mike Beverly will give you a fight before he goes under."

"I'm Nolton, the scout. I've just come from your cabin. The Indian is Bloody-Mouth, the Cherokee. I'm coming to you. Don't shoot."

I crashed through the growth to where he was treed and found the muzzle of a gun thrust into my face. On glimpsing me Beverly lowered the weapon and explained:

"Me'n that Injun have been playing a game of hiding and dodging for half an hour."

"He could have killed you within five minutes of the time he found you in the trail," I told him.

"Like —— he could!" he roared. "Guess you don't know me!"

"Giga-tsuhli, come here!" I called.

Almost immediately he stepped around Beverly's tree and stood close beside him.

Beverly gave a yell and started to strike with the barrel of his gun. I caught his wrist.

I could scarcely blame him for his quick fear. Giga-tsuhli had taken time during our separation to paint his face and throat, and had I encountered him unexpectedly I would needs have looked twice before recognizing him. Diamond-shaped figures in red and white, joined by straight lines, covered his throat to the ears and masked his strong face most weirdly.

"I am Bloody-Mouth," quietly informed the Cherokee. "You did not call your name."

Beverly scowled angrily and told him—

"Bad work, sneaking up on Mike Beverly like that."

The Cherokee's eyes twinkled. To me he said:

"He did not speak. He was like a wolf hiding."

"A mistake that ended all right for both of you," I told them. "Beverly, I have just been trying to make your people realize that this valley is very dangerous. Two of the Fairdens were killed yesterday by French Indians."

"Good land! Poor simple critters!"

"A Frenchman led the Indians north. They may come back any hour. You must take your women-folks back to the settlements."

"Phindry has a medicine that'll make 'em lick his hand."

"He may be able to save his own pelt, but I doubt it. I know he can't save yours. You're too sensible a man to believe in the nonsense he tells."

"You're a —— fool!" he exclaimed. "You're trying to talk down your betters."

And he bent and snatched up a small bag from the foot of the tree and exultingly held it close to my face. While I stared he ran on:

"Doctor Phindry talks nonsense, does he? Huh! This looks like it." And he shook the bag up and down. It gave out a chinking, jangling sound. "Know what's in it? Hard money! Know how I came by it? He dreamed where it was hid. It's mine! Know of any other man who can dream where to find hard money? Bah! you talk like a young fool. And this is only the beginning. As for leaving this valley before I git all the hidden gold you must think my head's empty."

"Just what is in the bag?" I asked. I realized I now owed Old Gormet a gun. He had won his bet about the gold.

"English, French, and Spanish silver and gold pieces. All hard money. Gold and silver. I'm poor at figgers, but there's a good twenty pounds! Just one little dream is worth twenty pounds! And it's only a beginning. Wait till he gits to dreaming stronger."

"Why should he give it to you? Why didn't he go and find it?"

He scowled for a moment, then sulkily replied:

"Ain't none of your business. Still, it's no secret. We're one fambly. We're going to Philadelphy and buy a big house. When he needs gold he knows where to find it."

"One family and living in the same house," I muttered. "You mean your daughter will marry him?"

"Meaning just that! She'd be a poor simple to take up with a man who don't own nothing but a rifle and some deerskin breeches."

And he grinned sardonically as he glanced at my worn and stained forest dress.

"Michael Beverly, you would sell your daughter!" I accused, now finding him loathsome. "Phindry hides a few handfuls of hard money in the ground and tells you where to find it. And for twenty pounds you'll sell your only girl to a witch-doctor!"

"You keep your tongue behind your teeth or I'll bash your head in!" he wrathfully warned. "I'll never sell my girl to a forest-runner, who owns only what he carries on his back. You ain't fit to sit down in the same room with Phindry."

"She's your daughter. God give her strength not to take any man she does not want. And never to take one for the sake of a few pounds in hard money."

The Cherokee lifted his hand to stop our talk and told us:

"Giga-tsuhli has a strong medicine. It tried to tell something. Let the white men listen. Now Giga-tsuhli hears it. Listen. The medicine is saying Beverly will try to kill Phindry before the forest leaves put on their paint. The medicine is saying Beverly will hear a woman crying. He will hear it until the black earth stops his ears."

"Go to ——, both of you!" roared Beverly.

He gained the trail and started on a run for his cabin.

An hour later while we were in camp on the bank of the creek and were roasting some of the deer meat I had left suspended from a high bough, a gun roared and a heavy ball smashed into a tree a foot from my head.

We plunged into the darkness and scouted toward the point whence came the bullet. We dared not light a torch to look for a trail, and the would-be assassin must have retreated immediately after pulling trigger. By a roundabout course we returned to our smoldering fire and, using long green poles, broiled the meat. Then we shifted our blankets some distance upstream and took turns standing watch.

Neither of us spoke the thought in our heads until the Cherokee took hold of my foot to arouse me for my turn at standing watch.

Then he said:

"The man Beverly did not follow us. Will you find him and kill him?"

"The witch-doctor has spoiled his head. We must not harm him."

CHAPTER V

DANDY CASE

THE Cherokee was loath to leave the cowardly shot uninvestigated, but even if I had pursued and overtaken Beverly I could not have harmed him. I credited his evil act to his tempestuous rage and while I did not propose to pose as his harried victim I could keep out of his path.

Our first move was to visit the rocky opening where the Frenchman and his cruel brood had been nonplussed by Old Gormet's long arrow. Finding no signs of the enemy there, we ascended the ridge to the spot where Gormet killed the man who was hunting for his lost medicine. We found a long arrow on the rock beside the path. It pointed east. I identified it as one of Gormet's hunting arrows, and it relieved our minds as to his safety and that of John Fairden.

"He has led Fairden back to the Conococheague," said Bloody-Mouth. "Now my brother's heart will be light. We will scout north toward the Juniata and look for signs. It will be like the old days when we went close to Venango and Duquesne."

"It is a good talk. We will shoot a deer and cook some meat and travel north," I agreed.

We returned to the valley and Bloody-Mouth soon bagged a deer. I waited while he asked the animal's pardon and called upon it to testify that the killing had not been wanton, but to preserve life.

This was a necessary ceremony no matter how hard-pressed we might be for time, for Bloody-Mouth felt the presence of Little Deer, the mythical chief of all the deer tribe. He knew that A'wi Usdi was close beside him and was asking the blood of the slain whether it "had heard." As firmly as a white man believes in his God the Cherokee believed he would suffer from rheumatism for the rest of his life if he killed a deer and neglected to ask the animal's pardon. Every Cherokee knows that rheumatism is inflicted by the ghost of a deer which the hunter failed to placate.

Having explained our necessity to the deer, Bloody-Mouth cut out the hamstrings and threw them away. If he had failed to do this, and had we by mistake eaten any of the tendon we would have been incapacitated for traveling. I was used to the peculiar notions of his people. When I was inclined to be impatient at them I remembered my own countrymen's belief in witches, hexing for buried treasure and the like.

We built a fire and cooked enough meat to last us for two days, and it was after we had broiled the last piece and had eaten heartily that an incident occurred that almost prevented my friend from scouting north. Had he been alone he would have changed his plans.

It happened in this way: We had gone to the creek to drink and bathe and I was in the lead as we returned to our dead fire. Reaching the edge of the opening, I was vastly angered to behold two wolves about to gobble our cooked meat. Without pausing to think I shot one of the brutes.

The instant I pulled the trigger I realized I had committed a grievous fault. I had deliberately killed Wa'ya, the watch-dog of Kanati, the Lucky Hunter. The high esteem in which the wolf is held by the Cherokees is shown by the fact that his is the largest clan of the nation, *An'wa'ya*. My friend was of this, the clan of the Wolf People.

Bloody-Mouth stared at the dead brute, then turned his amazed and troubled gaze on me.

"Your brother forgot," I said.

"Kanati, the hunting-god, and this dead Wa'ya, never forget," he mournfully replied. "You have no wolf-killer's medicine. Giga-tsuhli has none."

For a minute his mood was one of helplessness; then he decided—

"Giga-tsuhli will try."

He knelt by the dead beast, made a prayer, told the wolf that Beverly shot him and begged that the friends of the dead be not incited to take revenge on a

man of the Wolf People or on his white brother. Had he been a professional wolf-killer this deception would have succeeded, for the wolf-killer possesses a peculiar medicine. Not possessing that medicine, Bloody-Mouth had scant faith in the credulity of the wolf-ghosts.

Having finished talking to the ghosts, he stood up and extended his hand for my gun. Whether he had or had not deceived the ghost of the beast he believed he must clean my gun with certain rites. Otherwise the weapon would be useless.

This ceremony consisted of removing the barrel and inserting in it several sourwood rods heated over a new fire, and then leaving the barrel over night in the creek. I was opposed to any such delay. However, I knew my refusal must be accompanied by a plausible reason, so I told him:

"It will do no good, Giga-tsuhli. You are not a wolf-killer to cleanse a gun. Only a wolf-killer can cleanse a gun that has shot Wa'ya. Let us go north. We shall find no danger. I will not need my gun. When we come back I will get a new gun."

He was worried and did not speak for a minute.

"My brother speaks the truth," he sadly admitted. "I have no wolf-killer's medicine to clean a gun. We will go north. We will hope we shall find the path empty. My heart grows black when I think what may happen to my brother."

And he lifted his head as if hearing the howling of an invisible wolf-pack.

UNDER such unfavorable auspices did we start up the valley toward the point where the Tuscarora path crosses the mountains. Bloody-Mouth would carry none of the meat we had taken the trouble to cook. I reasoned, however, I might as well go the whole distance in offending Kanati, the Lucky Hunter, and wrapped up enough meat for two days. This was the first of all our scouts together when Bloody-Mouth was silent and depressed.

The enemy must have traveled along the beaten path, for we found no point where they had left it. Moving up the west side of the valley, we finally halted close to the first slope of the Tuscaroras and I insisted we pause long enough for my companion to find meat he could eat.

He killed a turkey with his ax and I surrendered to his insistence and buried the deer meat, a peace offering to the slain wolf. After eating we concealed all traces of our small fire and the Cherokee solemnly told me:

"Kanati has made us blind. He has let us follow an empty trail. The French Indians did not come up this path. If they came north they kept to the other side of the valley. The dead wolf put out my eyes."

I was ready to concede we were off the enemy's trail, for although the French Indians in single file could have followed the ancient path without leaving signs I did not believe they could have diverged and scrambled up the flank of the mountain without betraying their passage.

Bloody-Mouth continued:

"A voice tells me this is not a good place for men who have killed a wolf. A voice tells me we shall hear a Raven Mocker if we do not go back."

He was as brave a man as I ever met, but when attacked by some superstitous fear he had to run the entire gamut of depression before returning to his old fighting self.

Inwardly cursing my own stupidity in killing the wolf, I glumly agreed to turn back. We were about to set forth when the Cherokee touched my arm and pointed up the slope. I glimpsed a figure descending toward us through an open stand of gloomy pines. We both fell back until we were covered by some sumac bushes.

The figure disappeared for a few minutes and then reappeared, running at an easy lope. It emerged from the timber and came toward our hiding place.

"He is runner," whispered Bloody-Mouth. "He has traveled far and fast, He comes to find some one."

The man was naked except for a cloth around his middle. He carried no gun. I could not distinguish his nation. Bloody-Mouth murmured:

"He comes from a far tribe. He is not Delaware, Shawnee or Iroquois."

"Then he is our enemy!"

We kept low and edged around the sumacs so as to keep him in sight without betraying out presence. As he trotted nearer and in a line that would bring him close to the bushes, I observed he carried a knife and ax, and that around his neck hung a belt of wampum.

"He carries a belt! He may be friendly," I whispered.

"He is a Huron," hissed the Cherokee, his eyes venomous. "Keep back. I will stand out and have a talk with him."

He crept to the other end of the sumacs and came to his feet and lifted an open hand. The carrier of belts came to a halt, grunted in surprize and glared suspiciously.

Bloody Mouth spoke in Cherokee. The runner shook his head. Then followed Delaware and Shawnee, but the man insisted he did not understand. Bloody-Mouth tried him in the Mohawk dialect, and by the glint in the beady eyes I believed the man understood although he denied.

Then my friend spoke a western dialect I did not know, and the two drew close to each and talked. That is, the Cherokee asked questions and received a negative or an affirmative.

The Cherokee said something and touched the wampum hanging from the bronzed neck. The runner struck the hand aside.

The runner forgot and said in the Mohawk dialect—

"My talk is not for you."

"You have lived with French Mohawks on the St. Lawrence," said Bloody-Mouth. And straightway he represented himself as an outcast from his nation, friendly to the French.

They talked for some minutes until the runner appeared to be convinced. He opened a small bag hitched to his girdle and invited Bloody-Mouth to look within. Bloody-Mouth inclined his head and instantly the runner's fist struck him a blow on the back of the neck, the other hand grabbing for a knife.

I snapped my gun with no result, then swung it for a throw. The Cherokee fell on all fours, seized the man's ankles in a quick grasp and yanked them clear of the ground.

The fellow crashed backward, futilely stabbing with his knife, and by the time I was clear of the sumacs Bloody-Mouth had knifed him to death.

He climbed to his feet, rubbed the back of his neck and panted:

"The wolves are angry with me. They made my brother's gun miss fire. It is bad."

"The gun needs a new flint. But the ghosts feel better. They helped us kill the man," I soothed. "Now we'll look at the bag."

I opened it and found a folded piece of paper. On it, written in French and addressed to "Captain Claude de la Rue," were the lines:

You will carry this belt without delay to Tamaque of the Delawares and talk into it our desire for his active allegiance. Tell him a large number of warriors is coming from Detroit and Mackinac to march with his French father to Fort Duquesne. Tell him we come to give back to the Delaware nation all the land the English have stolen. If he brings a belt to Niagara and opens a bag of talk he will receive many presents. After delivering the belt you will continue harrying the frontier. We hear different stories about Forbes and his army. We are waiting to receive information from our agents in the Colonies. If you receive any trustworthy information you will send it by a swift runner at once.—CHABERT.

"What does the medicine-talk say?" asked Bloody-Mouth.

"Daniel de Joncaire, the man you call Chabert, sends it. It says evil. The wolf-ghosts are not angry now. They give us this man."

And I removed the belt and stuffed it with the writing into the bosom of my hunting-shirt.

"Help me lift him into the bushes."

The Cherokee wanted to scalp him but I persuaded him the trophy was useless.

After all there was no great credit in killing a bearer of belts. Such an emissary was supposed to find all roads open. In this particular case, where the bearer was merely a messenger from Chabert-Joncaire to an officer on a scout, the slaying could not be construed as a breach of red etiquette. Nevertheless I did not want the man scalped. My friend reluctantly put up his knife and we hid his body in the sumacs.

Tamaque, commonly called "King Beaver," chief of the Unalachtigo tribe of the Delawares, had been friendly to the Colonies until Braddock was defeated. Then he had listened to the French. Chabert-Joncaire was to the French what Sir Willian Johnson was to the colonies. That he was on the Niagara portage and anxious for Captain De la Rue to present his belt and talk to Tamaque was news that Forbes should know. The runner's quest for De La Rue in Path Valley was almost proof positive that this Frenchman was leader of the Fairden murderers. The runner would not have come down the Tuscarora path had De la Rue crossed those mountains. I was now convinced Bloody-Mouth had had the right of it when he said the war-party had gone up the east side of the valley; and I also believed it would cross the mountains and work evil along the Conococheague.

I told Bloody-Mouth:

"It means the French hope to hold up Forbes's advance by raiding our frontiers. They will be satisfied if they can keep Tamaque and the Ohio Delawares from joining with the English. If they can induce the Delawares to keep quiet on their mats Chabert will send enough Far Indians to burn outlying settlements and make the road rough for Forbes. If they can keep our army east of the mountains Duquesne will not be taken this year and the French will believe they have won the war."

"The wolf-ghosts have helped us. Giga-tsuhli should be made a wolf-killer. He made the ghosts believe the man Beverly killed the wolf. Has my brother more talk in his bag?"

My first thought was to cut over the mountains and look for the enemy on the Conococheague and race him for Chambers' Fort with a warning. My second thought was for the Beverly cabin. If the enemy were east of the mountains they would surely discover the Beverlys on their return. Chambers' Fort was a stout place. The Beverlys demanded first consideration.

"We will cut the man's throat for shooting at us in the dark. We will drive the medicine man and the women down to Fort Loudon," he declared.

"A ghost placed a hand on Beverly's head. He didn't know what he was doing." I soothed him.

"If a ghost's hand is on his head he will shoot at us."

I discouraged this fear and insisted Beverly would be himself by the time we reached the cabin. I was anxious really to alarm the family and compel its withdrawal from the valley. If Beverly and the witch-doctor refused to go, then the women and Arlington must be removed from danger.

We traveled as long as the light lasted and made a dark camp. Before sunrise we were afoot again. We came to the rocky opening and swerved aside to keep in the timber. We paused at the creek and perched a turkey. While I was dressing the bird and broiling it over a small fire the Cherokee stole away without a word.

I feared his dread of the wolf-ghosts had returned to worry his soul. He felt an urge to be alone and further to endeavor placating Kanati and his mythical watch-dogs. Up the valley he had believed he had fooled the ghosts by naming Beverly as the killer of the wolf; now there was the haunting doubt that they knew the truth and were waiting to punish him. Thus did his superstitious fears ride him hard, just as they have ridden the white man from the first dawn of imagination.

THE turkey was cooked and I was eating when Bloody-Mouth came running through the timber and with no attempt at stealth. Snatching up several

portions of the meat, he greatly alarmed me by saying:

"They are between us and the Beverly cabin. They came over Fairden's path across the ridge a short time before we came down the valley. They are on this creek very close. If they had left scouts behind them they would have smelled our smoke. They have raised a red club against the cabin. The black fog shall never move from the Beverlys and their friends."

He started west from the creek, eating as he went. As I raced after him the Frenchman's plan became plain to me. He had known of the Beverlys' arrival in the valley through one of his scouts, and if it had not been for the Fairdens doubtless he would have proceeded direct against the unfortunate family.

The burning of the Fairden cabin, he supposed, would have alarmed the newcomers, and also the death of two of his men by Gormet and the Cherokee had thrown the rest of the Indians into a panic. They had hurried up the valley out of control. Then De la Rue had succeeded in influencing them to try again.

Either they had crossed into the next valley and had recrossed by Fairden's path near the rocky opening or else they had retraced their steps along the east side of the valley while we were on the west side and near the Tuscarora path. I did not believe they had crossed the ridge. I caught up with Bloody-Mouth and expressed my fear that the tragedy would be completed before we could reach the cabin.

He was optimistic, and over his shoulder replied:

"The wolf-ghosts are helping us. The Frenchman has lost two men. He must lose no more or they will say he has lost his medicine. He will be very careful and go slowly. After we get below him we will turn back and cross the creek and follow along at the foot of the ridge. The Frenchman does not think any one is near. He will lead his men down the old path."

This gave me a grain of hope. If the enemy advanced slowly and used up time in scouting the place we might be able to reach the cabin and add our guns to its defense. I left it for the Cherokee to decide when to swing back to the east and cross the creek. This maneuver was ticklish work, for our imaginations planted an ambush behind every tree. We came to the narrow path, and Bloody Mouth paused for a few minutes to examine it carefully.

Coming to his feet, he whispered:

"They must have eaten the meat of a slow-running animal. They have not passed."

We pressed on to the foot of the ridge, and as we were ahead and it was a matter of time and not secrecy, we did not bother to hide our trail. It was a race even if De la Rue did not know it.

Although we were well back in the woods the taint of smoldering logs told us when we were abreast of the Fairden opening. And I ever have noticed that the stale, smoky smell of a burned house is entirely different from that of an honest wood fire.

We did not slacken our pace until well below the Fairden opening. Bloody-Mouth exulted:

"We are ahead of them! They go to spring a trap on women and will find a man of the Wolf People and a very brave white man waiting for them!"

"They will have scouts ahead. We must hurry. There may be scouts near the cabin now waiting for the Frenchman and his men to come up."

"A black war club will break their heads," he boasted.

Then he shivered as if with cold and pointed a trembling finger upward. Through a tiny opening in the forest roof I saw a raven "tumbling," or folding one wing so as to dive to a lower plane.

"That is very bad for some one," Bloody-Mouth whispered.

It was useless to argue against his convictions. Fearless in mortal strife, loyal in his friendships through the very gate of death itself, he still had a child's capacity

for being afraid of insignificant phenomena. I suggested only:

"It is not over the Beverly cabin. It smells death close to the Frenchman and his men. It goes to meet him."

We discovered no signs of any scouts ahead of us. If they were down the valley they were in the path or to the west of it. We kept close to the foot of the ridge, where the traveling was disagreeable and continued running until on my right I could glimpse the blue sky through the thinning tree-tops. We were skirting the narrow meadow. We slackened our pace and worked near the edge of the growth and at last halted opposite the end of the cabin.

THE first person I saw was Arlington. He was seated in the doorway whittling a long stick. Through the end window we next glimpsed motion as one or more figures moved about.

Then Ann Beverly came out with a bucket and started for the creek. Arlington tossed aside his stick and promptly relieved her of the bucket and the two walked slowly, side by side.

The Cherokee and I rushed from cover and I called the Englishman by name. He dropped the bucket in his amazement at beholding us. The woman Mercy stepped to the door and on sighting Bloody-Mouth vanished. I knew what she was up to and, calling on Arlington and the girl to turn back immediately if they would live, I leaped to the door and wrested the a from the unfortunate woman's hand.

Barring egress for her, I told the astounded Mrs. Beverly:

"The savages are coming here! Where is your husband?"

"Good Lawd deliver us! Forbes' scout. Injuns near!"

"Kill 'em! Kill 'em! Kill 'em!" rapidly shrieked the mad woman, striving to recover the ax.

"What's the matter?" demanded Arlington, running back behind Ann Beverly. "Your Indian friend said—"

"French-Indians coming! Inside, both of you. Where's Beverly?"

"Kill! Kill! Kill!" screamed Mercy.

"You hush, Mercy! We've got trouble enough as it is," said Mrs. Beverly, now outwardly composed and ready to face the worst. "Michael went with Phindry to look after the hosses up the creek. After that they're going to hex another pot of gold. You sure Injuns are near? We ain't seen hide nor hair of any. But Phindry's a master hand at keeping the red devils quiet."

"He'll not keep them quiet," I impatiently told her. "He couldn't keep them quiet when they wanted to murder the Fairdens." I glanced about for Bloody-Mouth.

Arlington understood and explained:

"He told us to run back here. Then he went around the cabin and toward the woods."

I drove them before me into the cabin and went to the small window that faced east and gave the call of *wa'huhu*, the screech-owl. Like an echo my cry was repeated, and for a moment a naked arm appeared and the hand beckoned for me to take to the timber.

"He's afraid of your sister," I told Mrs. Beverly. "I'll go and send him after your husband."

"Dr. Phindry says we're safe here as we'd be in Philadelphia," she insisted.

"Just how near are the wretches, Nolton?" quietly asked Arlington.

"We passed them at the Fairden opening."

"How many?" inquired Ann, speaking for the first time.

"The Cherokee scouted them. I did not see them. There were eighteen and the leader left after they killed the Fairdens."

"Of your own eyes you don't know any are near?"

"The Cherokee has eyes enough for all of us," I bluntly told her. "Unless you make haste you will know they're near of your own knowledge."

"Your red friend is afraid of a woman. He may be mistaken about the savages," she replied, her cheeks flushing.

I suspected that at that moment she

believed me to be afraid of my shadow. Turning to the door, I told Arlington I would send the Cherokee to find and warn the two men and would then return to help defend the cabin.

The Old England man stayed my departure by announcing:

"Mr. Beverly's coming now. But he's coming alone and from the south."

"Phindry's sent him back so's to be alone long enough to hide some more hard money, which he'll find in a dream," I growled.

This irritated Mrs. Beverly who sharply informed me:

"Now, Mr. Nolton, Injuns or no Injuns, no man's fool enough to hide money for another man to find."

"Don't let's talk about that, Mother," begged the girl. Then she said to me, "You say your red friend says French-Injuns are near. Just what do you expect us to do?"

"Stay here and fort the cabin. We've lost too many minutes in talk to run for it. If the horses were down the creek instead of up, I'd say run for it now, even if you women had to take turns walking."

"I'll wait for Michael. You take Ann and Mercy and start," calmly said Mrs. Beverly. "They'll think we're all here if they see signs of life at the winders. Maybe your Injun friend's mistook about any danger. You said you saw my man, Mr. Arlington. I can't see him." And she peered anxiously through the small opening facing south.

"On the east side. Must have entered the woods," said Arlington.

I hoped not, for the Cherokee, after all, was red and would never forget the shot fired at us under cover of night. If Beverly brought a fight to him I could not answer for my friend's restraint.

"Why should he take to the woods?" mused Ann, gently pushing her mother aside and scanning the hem of the growth.

Arlington, now at the east window, called out:

"He's coming through the woods, Miss Ann. I can see him. Probably swung back through the timber after seeing to the horses."

For the first time I realized that this was unlikely, for then either the Cherokee or I would have seen him or some signs of his passing. There was no sense in the man's traveling through the growth when he could pass the cabin in the meadow. I joined Arlington and made out a figure moving furtively just inside the timber. It appeared and disappeared.

It flashed over me that Beverly had discovered the Cherokee and was stalking him. I sprang to the door and started to prevent trouble just as the man emerged and walked toward me. I came to a halt, much amazed.

He was Fincer, Ensign Petny's sergeant.

"Good land, man! What are you doing up here? And where's Petny and the two soldiers?"

He was as surprized as I for a moment; then he impudently answered—

"That's their business."

"Your being here is my business! You talk," I ordered, falling in beside him and resting a heavy hand on his shoulder.

He glanced at me evilly, but with respect in his voice replied:

"I'm here because Ensign Petny sent me here. Hoss went lame and I left him down the valley. Ensign Petny, Joe'n Pete are at Loudon."

"He sent you to call the Beverlys back?"

"Just that. To call 'em back," he promptly replied. But all the time his shifty eyes were reminding me of a rat in a corner.

Not till we were at the door did I tell him:

"Your gun is welcome. French savages are near."

He halted but did not show the alarm I had expected.

"How do you know they're near? Any Frenchman with 'em?" he asked.

"Yes."

Mother and daughter greeted him at the door. Both by now were deeply worried over Beverly's absence.

Crouching in a corner Mercy was continually muttering, "Kill! Kill! Kill!" She repeated it so rapidly the words were scarcely distinguishable.

The cabin was stout. There were three of us, with the Cherokee outside to attack from the flank and the rear. As yet there was no sign of the enemy in the north. I had no fear of their creeping close in the eastern woods so long as Bloody-Mouth was there. I was glad my initial attempt to start the women down the valley had failed. With Fincer and his gun added our great danger would be from fire-arrows. When Beverly came in we would have no trouble in whipping the Frenchman's band. If he should lose two or three more men the rest would desert him.

In addition to the bucket there were two big kettles and several small cooking dishes. I pointed to the kettles and directed:

"Arlington, you and Fincer fetch water. You'll have time to make it, even if the savages appear while you're at the creek. I'll cover you with the guns. The savages can't steal near on the east side as the Cherokee is there."

Fincer promptly threw off his coat and picked up a big kettle. Arlington took the other, and the two started on the run for the creek. Ann and her mother went a little outside the door and stared at the silent forest. There was no danger of the men's being surprized as they were out of gunshot from any foe in the north, and as Bloody-Mouth was on guard in the east. I sat in the doorway, my own gun across my knees and with two guns leaning against the logs.

Finding the wampum belt something of a nuisance, I pulled it from the blouse of my hunting shirt, reached inside the door and tucked it into a black cloth bag hanging from a peg. As I did so I noticed Fincer's coat, which in his haste he had dropped carelessly on the floor near me. The inside pocket bulged slightly. His clothes and belongings had been searched three times to my knowledge.

I glanced back and saw Mercy, still in a corner, plucking at her coarse gown and muttering under her breath. Ann and Mrs. Beverly were still outside the cabin.

I leaned backward, slipped my fingers into the pocket and drew forth two folded sheets of paper. Opening them at arm's length, I recognized them as the papers stolen from poor Samp. With a glance at the women who were standing with their backs to me, I tucked the papers inside my blouse.

And I endeavored to imagine where the fellow had kept them concealed where we could not find them at Chambers' Fort or Shippensburg, yet close enough at hand for him to carry through each stage of his journey. Petny had wished to recall the women from the valley; Fincer had seized his errand as an opportunity to turn Sir John Sinclair's papers over to the enemy.

It was an odd chance that was sending Captain De la Rue so near a meeting with a traitor despite his failing to receive Chabert-Joncaire's message. If it had not been for the presence of the three women I would have been interested in observing how Fincer would maneuver to secure an interview with the Frenchman. With my first glance at the stolen papers I had vowed to take Fincer back to Major Andrew Lewis. I had erred about the Fairdens' guilt, yet I had succeeded in my errand of finding the spy.

The two men reached the creek and filled the kettles. I walked a short distance beyond the two women.

Mrs. Beverly remarked:

"Guess you're mistook, mister. Nary a sign of an Injun."

"I shall be perfectly contented if you never see them. I only know they started for here."

A low whistle sounded from the woods east of the cabin. Mrs. Beverly seized Ann's arm and made for the cabin. The two men were walking carefully so as not to spill any water.

I followed the women to the door and explained:

"That was not an alarm. My friend the Cherokee wishes to tell me something.

If he had discovered the savages were near his signal would have been different. Both of you stand out here and watch the woods to the north. I'll be back in a minute. Nothing can happen. Even if they broke from cover on the run they can't stop the men from bringing the water—nor stop me from coming back."

ONE would have as much success in trying to convince a Quaker that war is good or to make a Christian believe there is no devil as in endeavoring to shake the credulity of any Cherokee as to *Kalana Ahyeliski*, the Raven Mocker, the most dreaded of all evil forces. Equally horrible, and resembling it in some respects, is the cannibal ghost of the Iroquois. The Mocker steals life from the sick and dying and adds to his own life as many days as he succeeds in shortening the life of his victim.

"You heard something you thought was a Raven Mocker?" I gravely questioned Bloody-Mouth.

"I saw it!" And the brave fellow shivered violently. "I could not tell if it was a man or a woman Mocker. It was very old and withered and showed it had stolen many lives. A voice tells me the man Phindry is a Mocker wearing the shape of a man at times. You stay here."

"Giga-tsuhli, my brother, you stay here. The Mocker can not harm you if you are not under that roof. The Mocker has followed De la Rue from the Niagara."

He incensed and astounded me by locking his powerful arms around me and tripping up my heels and falling on me.

"White brother!" he panted, staring down into my angry eyes, "you shall not lose your life to wizard or witch if Giga-tsuhli can hold you."

"——, man! Let me up!" I cried, beginning to struggle.

But he maintained his advantage, and as I ceased my efforts he told me:

"My brother shall not lose his life trying to help a man who would kill him. We will fight that Frenchman, but not from under that bad roof."

Loud voices called from the cabin. They were answered from up the meadow.

"Let me up!" I cried. "Let me up, or never again are you a brother of mine."

At that I do not believe he would have released me had there been any suggestion of alarm or fear in the cries now being shouted back and forth.

"It's high time you was coming back, Michael," Mrs. Beverly's voice called out.

"Who is your friend?" we heard Arlington ask.

Bloody-Mouth rose and yanked me to my feet, but kept an arm linked through mine. We crept forward to spy on the clearing and were amazed to behold, near the upper end of the meadow Beverly, Phindry and the Frenchman who had led the Indians. But what was terrible was to see Mrs. Beverly and her daughter running toward the men. Fincer and Arlington were following them.

"God! They're crazy! I gasped.

"The woman who would kill is not with them," muttered Bloody-Mouth, tightening his grip on my arm. "They have heard the Raven Mocker and do not know it. If you were with them you would be like a very sick man with ghosts gathered to steal your breath, your blood, your life!"

I suddenly tried to wrench myself loose, and the next moment we were struggling again. I tried to cry out a warning to the women, but he clapped his open hand over my mouth. This gave me the advantage. I struck him heavily, and he went down to his knees, but instantly utilized his position toward my undoing. For as he fell, his hands clawing at my legs, he caught me around the knees and easily toppled me backward. With the breath shaken from me by the unexpected fall I was helpless for the moment.

Bloody-Mouth pulled me to my feet for the second time and sadly said:

"The man Phindry is a Raven Mocker. He has bewitched you. It is a bad way to die, but I can not fight my brother again."

He released me and I made for the edge

of the growth. And halted. Under the circumstances, it would have been impossible for me to have aided them. Even had I been in the cabin when the three men first showed themselves in the north, I could have done nothing to prevent the women from going to join them. And I halted because I saw Mrs. Beverly and her daughter, Arlington and Fincer had come up to the three men. I knew Phindry was talking by his nervous gesticulations.

And now I discovered what had bothered me from the first time I saw him; he used his arms and hands much as did Chabert-Joncaire when he was excited or angered.

I began to believe the witch-doctor possessed the powers he had boasted of, for not a savage showed himself. The seven of them stood and talked instead of coming to the cabin. Arlington stood by the girl and rested a hand on her arm as if anxious to draw her away. Fincer shook hands warmly with the Frenchman; and my hand pressed against Sir John's stolen papers. Ann must have spoken to her mother, for she turned toward the cabin and pointed to it, her other hand resting on her mother's arm.

The next instant nearly a score of painted savages were streaming from cover and encircling their poor victims. Michael Beverly stood stiff and motionless for a count of five. I was beginning to think the savages would not touch them when Beverly screamed and leaped to catch Phindry by the throat. The Frenchman tripped him off his feet and as he went down a savage struck him with an ax. The two women shrieked terribly. Arlington leaped upon the Frenchman and instantly Phindry hit him over the head with the barrel of his gun.

All this happened as rapidly as a man can snap his fingers twice. Then the savages were surrounding the group. They dragged Arlington to his feet and I saw him stagger as he strove to recover his balance. They stood Beverly on his feet, but he was already dead, with his legs like strings. He fell and was left to lie.

We were helpless. To shoot into the crowd was to risk hitting the women, as the distance was too great for anything like marksmanship.

The group swirled about, and then captors and captives were rapidly swallowed up in the timber. Four of the savages, however, turned back and raced for the cabin. Now was our chance for reprisal, but the Cherokee clutched my wrist and whispered:

"They will not hurt the medicine woman. If they do not look for us we will know they have not been told we are here. Now we are ready to fight the Frenchman, but we must move softly and fight from the dark.

The first of the four men paused long enough to scalp Beverly, then raced after his companions, leaping high in the air and yelling hideously. I prayed neither of the women had seen the cruel act. I saw mad Mercy's face grinning from the east window, as if looking for us, but the cabin door remained invitingly open.

On ran the four men, whooping and dancing. We kneeled and held our guns ready to shoot. All the time the Cherokee was insisting they would not harm the woman. He caught my arm as they neared the door.

Before I could tear myself loose they were jostling and crowding, each eager to be the first to enter. They were through the door by the time I was free.

Their yelling suddenly stopped as I ran toward the east window to use my gun. Squawks of fear sounded, followed by an ear-splitting shriek. I was at the window in time to see a savage, with the black cloth bag in his hand, leap through the doorway.

A dead man lay on the earthen floor. Another was leaning against the logs, his hands pressing against a terrible wound in his side. His painted lips were trying to frame his death-song. The third man, wearing a swallow-medicine to make him swift in attack, had caught up Fincer's coat and was trying to escape. But Mercy, screaming as I never heard a mortal scream before or since, caught him

with a swing of the ax as he turned his back. Then she gave the wounded man another blow and he fell beside the others.

Nor was she done. She raked coals from the fireplace, smashed a jug of liquor, and heaped the few furnishings upon the blazing patch. A table and four stools and a quantity of dry bark were quickly added; and I knew in another ten minutes the seasoned logs would be ablaze, giving a belated answer to the smoke that marked the passing of the Fairden cabin.

Dropping the ax, Mercy stepped outdoors, smoke billowing after her. Then I remembered the savage who had escaped and hastened to repair my neglect. He was out of range, running swiftly and never once glancing back. I called to Mercy, but she did not hear me, or at least did not heed me. She ran lightly up the meadow to where Michael Beverly lay dead. She kept up an incessant screaming, and crying over and over:

"I killed them all! I killed them all!"

The one survivor heard her and fear gave new energy to his swift-flying feet. She was not pursuing him, however, and without a look at Beverly she entered the growth where the Frenchman and his prisoners had disappeared.

I ran back to the Cherokee, disgusted with having played the part of an onlooker only. I found him depressed because his gun had missed fire when he attempted to shoot the man carrying the black bag. He could not decide whether the wolf-ghosts had returned to bother him or whether it was the work of a Raven Mocker, angry with him because he had kept me from entering the cabin. With a sharp cry for him to follow I started north to scout after the retreating band.

He refused to accompany me and called out:

"Let my brother wait. Sourwood must be put in the barrel and the barrel in running water for one night. Then we will overtake them."

"I'll scout alone," I told him.

The band ahead moved leisurely and stopped entirely when the man who had escaped from Mercy overtook it and told his story. They had no scouts out and were inclined to keep very close together when they heard Mercy boasting of her red work. And she was searching for them.

Gradually I worked closer. I heard Mrs. Beverly cry out:

"O, Michael Beverly! And this is the end! O, Michael Beverly! Why did we ever put faith in that awful critter!"

Her outcry dwindled to a wailing sound, and as she became still the girl loudly prayed:

"O, God! You didn't save him! Save my poor mother! No man can save us. Save my dear mother! Or let us die now and quickly!"

Then I knew why fate had sent me over the mountains on a false trail. Then I knew why all had happened to me as it had happened. Why I had offered to Major Lewis to go to the French as a deserter carrying stolen papers, and why the papers had come into my keeping.

And if I had lost my love, why, so much the easier it would be for me to lose my life. And Ann Beverly had accused me of holding back while two misguided men were being murdered!

I straightened up and trailing my gun walked noisily through the growth and burst upon the glaring, staring band of murderers. Ignoring both prisoners and crouching savages I stepped up to the Frenchman and in my best French told him:

"Captain Claude de la Rue, I am carrying important papers to Captain Jean Baptiste Boucher Sieur de Niverville, commandant at Venango. I desire an escort of your savages if you are not returning across the mountains immediately."

Phindry, Arlington and Fincer were staring at me as if doubting their senses.

De la Rue also was shaken by amazement. His voice was husky when he found it and managed to reply:

"M'sieur speaks of an important business, but he has forgotten to give his name."

In my mad exultation to serve mother and daughter I had not thought of that very important detail. But as I met Arlington's wondering, stupefied gaze and glimpsed the rat eyes of Fincer glaring at me, I recalled my talk with Major Andrew Lewis, and my wits woke up.

I heard myself calmly telling De la Rue:

"Law officers in the Colonies, who believe they have cause to remember me, and who have sought me hard and far, call me 'Dandy' Case."

CHAPTER VI

SKIRMISHING

PHINDRY was the first to recover from his amazement sufficiently to speak. He danced up to me and would have clawed my face had I not caught his wrist and twisted it until he hung over my arm. I released him and he backed away and shrieked:

"Put this man to the torture, m'sieur! He's a liar. He killed two of your men."

I struck him in the face with my open hand and said—

"Liar yourself, traitor!"

To De la Rue I explained:

"This man has played a double game. He takes French money but works against France."

The savages crouched low, eager to spring upon either of us. Captain De la Rue stepped between me and the witch-doctor and stared at each of us in turn. He warned us:

"Let there be no show of trouble here between you two. My red children will be quick to follow a bad example."

Then he said to me:

"What you say, M'sieur Case, seems impossible. M'sieur Phindry has given us much information for the gold we've paid him."

"Information that amounts to nothing," I jeered. "Information to keep you satisfied, but nothing of value. So much and no more has he done for your gold. Now let us see what he has done against France."

"—— you!" screamed Phindry. "I'll toast your hide with a hot gun-barrel. Captain De la Rue, this man is known to be a scout for Forbes."

"Captain De la Rue, this man is a marvelous liar."

"He came to this valley to learn who was sending information to the French," wildly accused Phindry.

"I came to carry information to the French," I countered. "Ask this scoundrel why he stopped a belt sent you by Chabert Joncaire."

Phindry gaped stupidly, his tongue helpless for the moment. De la Rue, nonplussed by the nature of my accusation, stared blankly at me, then narrowed his gaze as he turned to the witch-doctor. Pointing a finger at Phindry I continued:

"You stopped that belt and written message, Phindry. You have had time to give both to him. You haven't done it. Fortunately for France I found your victim, the Huron, when he was dying. You thought you left him dead. I was at the cabin to get back what you stole from the belt-carrier."

Wheeling swiftly on De la Rue I explained:

"Phindry was not there. I waited for him to come. Then your savages came and I took to the woods until I could come upon you like this."

"He lies! He lies!" passionately cried Phindry. "He's making this stuff up! There was nothing in the cabin but my black bag. When you understand what a liar this man is I ask for my pay, as my only reward, that he be given to me."

De la Rue kept turning his head from one to the other, much like an owl.

My back was to the Beverly women. Once I glanced back at Ann Beverly and did not care to meet her horrified gaze again. I heard her mother groan—

"Oh, you devil's beast!"

An Indian came through the circle carrying the black cloth bag. I directed Captain De la Rue's attention to it and cried—

"That should be his property!"

De la Rue snatched the bag from the savage's hand and held it up and asked—

"This is yours?"

"Yes, yes. Go through it. Then search me. After you're satisfied, give this man to me."

The captain opened the bag and dumped the contents on the ground. The savage had not paused to examine the contents, due to his fear of Mercy. And in addition to the few personal effects a man carries when adrift in the wilderness was the wampum belt and the folded piece of paper.

De la Rue showed the whites of his eyes as he stared down at the wampum. After a few moments of complete bewilderment Phindry yelled:

"A —— trick! Some one put it there! That man put it there!" And he violently gesticulated at me.

"Your clumsy defense will help you none, Phindry," I coldly told him.

"His name is not Case. He's Justin Nolton, one of Forbes' scouts. He arrested John Fairden and accused him of being a French spy. He—"

"Silence, m'sieur. Both of you be silent!" commanded De la Rue, his dark face screwed into a perplexed scowl. "Some one has lied himself into a fire. We'll find the truth if there's any virtue in hot coals. You say you have papers, M'sieur Case?"

I fished out Sir John Sinclair's papers and handed them over and explained:

"They cost a life when I secured them in Philadelphia, m'sieur. The man who was carrying them to Sir William Johnson is dead."

Fincer, minus his coat, made an inarticulate sound and attempted to crowd forward to look over the captain's shoulder. A burly savage hurled him back.

Addressing the captain, I added sneeringly—

"The man Phindry will next be saying he secured the papers."

Fincer now was satisfied as to the identity of the two sheets of paper and frantically screamed:

"They're mine! They was in my coat at the cabin! This man stole them!"

De la Rue read Chabert-Joncaire's message, glanced at Sir John's papers and placed them in a bag at his belt. Then he hung the wampum belt around his neck and sternly ordered:

"No more now. We will look into this later. Either M'sieur Case is what he says and you two men are double-traitors, or you two tell the truth and this man should be burned over a small fire."

One of the savages, the man who had hurled Fincer backward, now forced his way to Arlington's side. The lower half of his face was painted a ghastly white and the upper half was the color of blood.

He dug his fingers into the Old England man's shoulder and spoke in a far western dialect I did not understand. But the hand gripping the shoulder was easily interpreted. The savage was demanding a victim. The glowing eyes and tigerish impatience of the warrior's companions were eloquent of meaning, also.

Arlington carried himself well—head up, chin thrust forward, but his face was strangely white.

Before De la Rue could answer the savage's request I softly informed him:

"Very rich Englishman. Just arrived in the Colonies. Easily good for ten thousand pounds' ransom."

De la Rue's eyes flew open, then half closed. He addressed the savages briefly. They did not like what he said. They began crowding around poor Arlington and forcing him away from the women. I had seen them shoulder their leader one side when intent on killing one of the Fairdens.

I caught a glimpse of Arlington's face as they jostled him back. He met my gaze and there was no hope in his eyes.

"They are about to destroy ten thousand English pounds," I told De la Rue.

"Devil or decent man—don't let them torture me!" called out Arlington.

De la Rue forced his way into the group surrounding the Englishman and shouted what I took to be promises if they would release their man. They butted him back

with their shoulders. I heard him groan:

"Ferocious beasts! Ten thousand pounds!"

Now they were trying to trip Arlington's feet from under him. His staring eyes were focused on me as he all but went down.

In English I assured him—

"I have a medicine that will make it easy."

"This is hell! These are the evil spirits!" hysterically cried out poor Mrs. Beverly. And it was enough to destroy any woman's reason; any man's for that matter.

"Ten thousand pounds, De la Rue! Offer them the two traitors for him!"

"*Mon Dieu!* I'll offer the three of you!" growled the captain, returning to his task of rescue.

Their lust was not to be denied. De la Rue dared not use violence. I believed I could at least win a painless death for the Englishman, but even that alternative was horrible. Companionable, gracious and inoffensive, many such as he had died hideously.

My ruse, for it was nothing more, must be put into execution at once if at all. Yet I hesitated. It would mean the sentencing of a man in his prime to immediate death.

"Kill! Kill! Kill all of 'em!" screamed mad Mercy's voice as she came through the growth.

Never had a human voice sounded sweeter in my ears. The man who had fetched the black cloth bag howled in terror and scuttled away. His companions forgot their prisoner and dodged back into the growth, and there was much fear behind the paint on each fierce countenance.

Arlington staggered to the captain and stood close beside him. De la Rue shifted the wampum to Arlington's neck and muttered:

"I am trying to turn a profit of ten thousand pounds."

"Kill 'em! Kill 'em!" cried Mercy, now almost upon us.

"A woman who has lost her reason by seeing her husband killed by the savages. She will kill every Indian she can," I told De la Rue."

"*Diable!* She'll drive my children back to Detroit," snarled the Frenchman, and he drew his ax and took a step forward.

"Not that!" I warned. "Or you won't have a savage left to follow you. I will handle her."

The Indians had their heads thrust from behind trees and over fallen timber as Mercy came upon us. She halted, amazed at the sight of so much red game. Her fixed smile had changed none. She slowly turned her eyes on the painted visages, and as she looked the warriors ducked from view, their superstitious dread of the mentally affected making them helpless to resent any attack.

Mercy drew a deep breath and looked about for a weapon. Recognizing me as a friend she darted to my side and attempted to take my ax. I seized her hands and gently drew them behind her and held them with one hand while I picked up a long bow from the ground.

I called for a piece of rawhide. The Frenchman spoke to the savages. The man who had insisted on torturing Arlington tossed a bow-string of sinew at my feet. This was the most any of the savages would do to render her harmless. Not for the pleasure of torturing a dozen prisoners would one of them have placed a hand on her.

De la Rue perceived my purpose and with a scalping-knife cut the string. She made no move to escape as I proceeded to tie each wrist to the bow. Grunts of relief sounded from the concealed savages as I finished my task.

"Turn her loose, and drive her back if she tries to follow us," commanded De la Rue.

I was willing to do this as I knew the Cherokee was near and would promptly release her. I pushed her gently and told her to go.

Ann Beverly moaned:

"Oh, if there is any power to punish! Better kill her. That would be a kindness compared to leaving her to starve and be eaten by wolves."

Mercy wheeled at the sound of the girl's voice and went to her side. I turned back to De la Rue and told him:

"Better let her stay with the women. She can do no harm. She did you a good turn by scaring the savages away from the Englishman."

De la Rue called out, and the Indian who had brought Phindry's black bag came from hiding. The commander put a question to him. After the man had replied the commander shrugged his shoulders and glared venomously at Mercy, and in French muttered:

"*Mon Dieu!* Such a mad one! Kills three of my best men! Thank God Forbes' army is not made up of women!"

Then he spoke to the Indians and I knew from the immediate preparations to march that they knew the fate of the dead men in the cabin and would wait no longer for them to return.

The Indians began streaming along the trail to the north, and only De la Rue's insistence could prevail upon some of them to drop back and bring up the rear. None wanted to be near Mercy. All were anxious to get away from that part of the valley.

I told De la Rue—

"Your savages can't hold it against you for the three men killed in the cabin."

"M'sieur, you dress like a coureur-de-bois. Unless you masquerade you must know something about savages. They will blame me for every loss they sustain on this war-path. You are sure the Englishman is a very rich man?"

"Very rich. If you can get him to Montreal or Quebec the ransom is as good as in your two hands."

Arlington was ahead of us with his hand tied at his back and with a length of rawhide noosed around his neck. As he stumbled over a root and the savage leading him gave a jerk on the cord he made a choked, gasping sound. De la Rue spoke to the savage and after that the line was not held taut.

The Frenchman complained to me—

"If I save him I will have to pay much to the savages in gifts."

"If you get him into Canada you may decide to leave the army and live at ease."

"*Pardieu!* They deserve but little. They will kill when I would save."

Fincer and Phindry were ahead of Arlington. From their frequent backward glances I knew they did not enjoy the thought of my being close to De la Rue. Behind Arlington walked the Beverlys. They were not tied. Mercy trailed behind them, her hands at her sides, tied to the bow. For the time De la Rue and I were at the end of the procession, with a red scout on each side and one in the rear.

Suddenly De la Rue asked:

"You say you know Captain De Niverville, M'sieur Case?"

"Very well."

Inwardly I prayed I should never know him better. His ascendency over the Abnaki Indians was remarkable, and one had but to ask New England folks about him to learn how savagely he had ravaged that frontier in King George's War. He led the Abnaki at the massacre of Fort William Henry. We of the borders knew him as intimately as we wished.

"I do not remember seeing you at Venango," continued the captain.

"We never met before. I saw M'sieur De Niverville at Montreal two winters ago. Last year, before he destroyed Fort William Henry, I carried important information to him. Last year I talked with him in Quebec. Until this season my work has been in the Champlain country. But it was M'sieur Chabert's suggestion, not De Niverville's, that I shift to this frontier."

As I finished I observed Fincer and Phindry had dropped out of the line and were now waiting to drop in before or behind us. Phindry had caught some of our talk. He fiercely denounced:

"He's a —— liar, impostor, spy for the English. All last winter he scouted for the English."

"Silence! And fall into line," De la Rue commanded. They stepped in front of us. I could see Phindry's insistence in

accusing me was having an accumulative effect on the Frenchman, although as yet he did not know which to believe.

I suspected a trap in his next query, which was—

"M'sieur does not happen to know about two of my savages being killed in this valley two days ago?"

"No. After finding the belt-carrier dying in some sumac bushes up the valley I came south and passed the ruins of the cabin. I had barely reached the lower cabin when your savages came from the woods and surrounded these prisoners. I dared not approach and make myself known until I was positive there was a French officer in command. "

"He is telling nothing but lies!" roared Phindry.

"If you will let me take that man out of the path I will, with only my bare hands, make him say I am telling the truth," I begged. "He will next be saying I had to find you in the woods, and was forced to join you."

"For the last time I want silence between you two men," warned the Frenchman, "I will not act hastily. I will soon know the truth at Kuskuski* or Sawcunk, where we will go and deliver the belt to Tamaque. At our next camp I shall start a runner for Venango. He will bring back word to one of those towns from M'sieur De Niverville. The talk he brings will be the death sentence for one man, or two men. We will have no more talk about it. I will treat men alike until I know the truth. We shall not have to wait very long. How did you get acquainted with the Englishman?"

"I met him in Philadelphia soon after his arrival. He was curious to visit the frontiers. He wishes to write an account of his travels in North America."

"His travels came near to leading him into a kettle. You know enough about him to know he can pay a big ransom?"

"He is very rich. What will a man not give to save his life? He will be glad to ransom the women."

"Ah! Because of the young woman, eh? But if I claim him I must give the women to the savages. He must make his trade with them. It is possible I could handle it for him."

Despite his warning I ventured to whisper:

"Those two men ahead should be punished. They have betrayed France to the Colonies."

This time he did not flare into a rage. Perhaps he was thinking of the fat ransom the Englishman would pay. He chuckled grimly and murmured:

"M'sieur runs too fast. France knows how and when to punish. The man Phindry has sent us information for two years. I do not know the other man; but Phindry has vouched for him. I have never heard of you before, M'sieur Case. I am holding you three in the same esteem until I learn the truth.

"I say only this: Either the two ahead are turned over to the Indians or M'sieur Case goes to them. They will insist on having a man to burn. Two women will not satisfy them. If I take the Englishman away from them, then it's one or two men to take his place. There is truth somewhere in this muddle, and when we find it the innocent man, or men, will have the pleasure of seeing how bravely an imposter, or imposters, can die. He, or they, will need great courage."

"De Niverville will speak for me," I assured. "I only ask that he be told by the runner of the papers I brought from Philadelphia and delivered to m'sieur. And of the belt that was intercepted by the traitor ahead."

"He will be told all about both," he gravely replied. "But I wish that m'sieur had brought papers another man did not claim to have stolen. But we shall see. We shall find the truth. Two, or one, will be found guilty of working wrong against his Most Gracious Majesty. Two, or one, will pay a very sad price.

*Kuskuski. In 1758 composed of four distinct settlements; pop. 1,000. On Beaver Creek, near modern Newcastle, Lawrence County, Pa. Tamaque made it his home at times. He also lived at Sawcunk, near modern Beaver, Beaver County, Pa. The last was the home of Shingass, brother of Tamaque, and implacable foe of the English.

However, the subject wearies me."

He talked no more with me after that but shifted out position ahead of Phindry where he left me alone for some miles while he walked behind the witch-doctor and conversed in low tones. I had no means of knowing how much Phindry had prejudiced me in his estimation, if at all. For when he rejoined me his manner was courteous. I believed he was holding his mind open and withholding judgment until he could hear from the one-eyed commandant at Fort Venango.

We crossed the valley to the foot of the Tucarora Mountains, and De la Rue gave the order to camp. His first act was to produce a lead bottle of ink and write a message for De Niverville and start it for Venango by one of the younger men. Two men had gone out to hunt without being told. The Frenchman sent another man to investigate the sumacs and my story of the dead belt-carrier.

While he was doing this the savages built fires and hung two kettles filled with water. At first Mercy kept close to the Beverlys, but as the men quickly returned with two deer she became interested in watching them cut up the meat, and left her relatives despite their low-voiced pleading that she remain.

As she approached the butchers they hastily drew back. She passed on and paused before older men, who sat and smoked and talked about the bad medicine dogging their steps on this particular war-path. These middle-aged men had seen much of war and boasted of many scars. But when Mercy stopped and peered down into their faces, her teeth ever showing between the parted lips, there was none who met her gaze. She could not inflict bodily harm, but the fixed smile was enough to halt a conversation. When she approached a group it melted away to reform on the opposite side of the camp.

I went to her and told her to stay with the Beverlys, and so long as she did keep with them no red man intruded, although the mother and daughter were the savages' prisoners. Phindry and Fincer kept close together, whispering much and scowling murderously when they glanced in my direction. I saw the savage with the white and red face squat beside Phindry and talk with him. That was the weakness of my position: I knew none of the savages; I could not talk their tongue. My only strength was the fact I had imposed sufficiently on De la Rue's credulity to induce him to send a runner to Venango. Once the runner returned with De Niverville's denial of any acquaintance with me it would mean a sorrowful finish for the last of the Noltons.

The women were not bothered. De la Rue visited them long enough to say that although they were the Indians' prisoners he was confident he could arrange for their ransom through Arlington or some of his own countrymen in Canada. And his steady gaze at the girl showed that he approved of her, although she was deathly pale.

After leaving them he returned to me and endeavored to learn more about me. He turned the conversation to the preceding year's campaign around Ticonderoga in an endeavor to check up my story and learn how much I really knew about the French commanders there. This was ticklish ground, although I knew all that was current in the Colonies.

We were interrupted by a loud shouting among the savages. My first sensation was of relief. Then came a great fear.

The big man with whom Phindry had talked came striding toward us. De la Rue frowned and tightened his lips.

"White Canoe," he murmured. "A Mississauga man, he wants something."

"His people accepted the Iroquois ax against you until last year," I reminded.

The commander stiffened as White Canoe came to a halt. The half white, half red face was an immobile mask through which his fierce eyes glittered. He commenced haranguing the commander and I perceived that his companions were impatiently waiting for the Frenchman to give an answer.

De la Rue replied briefly; then turned to me and said:

"This is very bad business, M'sieur Case. It threatens to cost me many good English pounds. The savages say they do not want the girl's mother. They say I can have her and they will take the Englishman in her place."

I did not know what to say. Ordinarily I would have urged him to refuse the proposed trade, as the women, when not killed outright, were invariably ransomed and usually were treated kindly until ransomed. But the loss of five men had raised a terrible devil in them. They believed they must kill to cover the bones of their dead.

"Make them trade both women for him," was what I finally replied.

"And my ten thousand pounds flies away," he groaned.

Arlington suddenly strode across the open place, his handsome face now white and haggard. His hands were tied behind his back. In French he told De la Rue:

"I overheard your talk with this traitorous rascal. Yet his suggestion is good. Make no poor trade. Make them give both women for me. Then, if you are a white man under that —— paint and barbarous toggery see to it that I get a quick death."

"If they take you I can't interfere in their pleasure, M'sieur Arlington," replied De la Rue.

"Arlington, I'm not to blame for your being here. I didn't get you into this fix. But if they offer to torture you I will do as I promised down the path. I will open a way so it will be painless," I told him.

"*Pardieu!* Cheat my savages of their pleasure and you'll take m'sieur's place before any word can come from Venango," angrily warned the Frenchman.

"They will cheat themselves and will blame no one," I assured.

Arlington had no faith in my promise. He threw back his head and started to speak. White Canoe struck him in the face and caused blood to trickle from the corners of his mouth. The savage then talked arrogantly to the Frenchman.

De la Rue, without turning his head, told Arlington:

"Walk back to the women. You make them worse."

The Englishman turned and started back, but some of the savages blocked his path, and I believed the time was come when I must trick the savages into killing the man instantly. He was saved for the time being, however, by Mercy's running to him. She commenced screaming, "Kill! Kill!" And she kicked at the savages' legs and tried to bite their naked arms. They gave ground as if the Cherokee's Raven Mocker were assailing them. She kept by his side as he rejoined the women.

After White Canoe finished his speech the savages crowded around us. Despite the streaks of paint De la Rue wore I could see he was much troubled. He mumbled:

"It isn't the money entirely. But they've lost five men since entering this valley. Their dead must be covered. They will have him. I will refuse, but they will take him. You must not turn them against us by any ruse to save the man."

Several of the savages, whooping in anticipation of the sport awaiting them, began trimming a stunted oak and gathering dry brush and building it in a circle several feet from the tree. Now that the time had come for action I dreaded to proceed with my trick. He must not be tortured, but how could I know that some miraculous intervention wouldn't save him? Just when should I decide he had no chance whatever? The sweat blurred my eyes as I endeavored to bring myself to the test. It was not likely I would fail in my merciful purpose, but what if I did? To be followed through life by the accusing eyes of a man I had promised to save from hell.

"Good God!" I cried. "Can't you put it off? Make some compromise? Tell them the mad woman will follow them wherever they go. Tell them you'll

untie her hands unless they wait. Anything to gain time."

"If I release her they'll kill him out of hand. That will be better than torture. But there's the ransom. I could retire and live like a white man. If I can keep him alive till I reach Sawcunk or Kuskuski I may get word from De Niverville. I'll talk the mad woman to them. It's a matter of minutes now." He paused and I waited for him to take some action. His eyes grew hard, and he cried, "I'll do better than that. I'll promise them one man, possibly two men, when we reach Kuskuski."

He commenced haranguing the savages and I walked across to where Arlington was seated near the women. I rapidly told him:

"The Frenchman is trying to save you. He wants the ransom. If forced to trade you to the Indians he will insist on both women. If you're traded he will insist that you be spared until they reach an Indian village. He has sent one runner to Venango. He will start another to bring word from the commandant there to spare your life. If he can keep you alive till that word comes he believes he can buy you back."

Arlington bowed his head to show he understood, but said nothing.

Ann Beverly turned eyes of loathing on me and whispered:

"You have great influence with the Frenchman and his savages."

"At Kuskuski either I or that devil Phindry and Fincer go to the stake," I replied. Her expression slowly changed and became one of blank amazement.

"I'll pray it'll be the three of you!" moaned Mrs. Beverly. "O Michael! Poor Michael! That bloody devil has hexed you into a mortal grave!"

Arlington jerked up his head and stared at me intently until a little smile twisted his pale lips.

"By ——! I wonder!" he muttered, still boring his gaze into my face.

And for a moment I feared he had lost his mind; for he began laughing silently. There was no trace of mirth in it. The savages watching us were puzzled at what they took to be grim amusement. They did not care to approach and face the smiling Mercy.

The Frenchman finished his talk and came toward us. Halting a few feet from Arlington, he sharply said in French:

"I've done the best I can, m'sieur. War is ever cruel. He who would soften its rigors will be defeated. Yet I wish to be humane when possible. Some of my children are willing to wait until we reach Kuskuski. Others would eat their cake now. So they will vote on it. Be ready for the worst."

Arlington drew a deep breath and in a firm voice asked—

"Do they trade both women for me?"

De la Rue nodded. Arlington next asked—

"Can you make it easier for me, m'sieur, if they vote not to wait?"

De la Rue slowly shook his head and quickly turned away. Over his shoulder he advised:

"Go to them. It will be better. They'll have you the minute the mad woman isn't looking. The longer they have to wait the worse it will be for you. I've done all I can."

Arlington scrambled to his feet rather awkwardly yet as one who goes willingly. And his countenance was composed, even smiling, as he bowed to the two women and announced:

"I must leave you for a bit. You are exhausted. Withdraw to the lower end of the camp and try to get some sleep."

Mrs. Beverly did not sense the impending tragedy, but her daughter felt some nameless evil closing in about them. She thrust her fingers between her teeth to strangle the sounds of her sobbing and buried her face in her mother's lap.

"God!" whispered Arlington so low I alone heard him. "Why do women have to know about such things?"

"I'll keep my promise if it comes to the worst," I told him in French. "I will make the path easy even if I have to take it behind you. The women are safe."

"We can praise God for that," he murmured. Then with a flash of spirit, "Just who are you?"

Ordinarily the Old England man was one to be trusted. I was convinced of that. But if my ruse failed or was delayed in the working there is little the average man wouldn't tell to escape the Indians' hellish ingenuity in causing pain.

"I am called Dandy Case," I replied. "I was given the name when I dressed differently."

"An honest man can never quarrel with the worst rogue who helps him die gracefully," he mumbled. And he resumed his advance toward the impatient savages.

I stepped back to the women and sharply told Mercy—

"Go and stand behind him."

Her streak of madness was confined to an inexorable hatred of all Indians. Aside from her mania she could reason. Without a word she rose and glided after the Old England man. The howling, dancing savages did not relish her approach although she was powerless to do them harm. They rapidly spread out in a wide circle, leaving the man and woman in the center. They seated themselves and Mercy and Arlington did likewise.

Then White Canoe stood up and spoke briefly, outlining, I assumed, the conditions of the bargain offered by the Frenchman. Not a sound rose from the circle as he seated himself and picked up a war-club the knob of which was painted red. He turned and stared at the Frenchman and me standing behind him and dramatically hurled the club to the ground.

"*Bête féroce!* He votes for immediate death! He would burn up ten thousand English pounds!" muttered the Frenchman.

The next man picked up the club and after a moment's hesitation dropped it. I remarked:

"Your influence is slight, m'sieur. All will drop the club."

He scowled and gestured for me to be silent. Phindry lounged up and grinned wolfishly. To me he said:

"I'll see them drop the club for you next, imposter."

I drew back my fist but De la Rue caught my arm and whispered:

"Do you, too, wish to die before reaching Kuskuski? White men striking white men is very bad for my red children to see. Be patient, both of you. I have promised that one of you shall watch the other burn."

Phindry advanced to stand close to the circle and behind White Canoe. The next man lifted the club, but glanced up and met Mercy's baleful gaze. She did not, I believe, understand the cruel business, but her eyes followed the club as it passed from hand to hand. Very possibly she was interested in it because it was a weapon, something she could do deadly damage with if her hands were free. The man held the club uncertainly, his eyes held to the grinning face. He shivered convulsively and passed the club without dropping it.

De la Rue whispered:

"M'sieur Case was very clever to send that woman along. M'sieur must like the Englishman."

"He is a helpless prisoner and new to our country. I would save him. I would feel the same toward any man, be he no enemy of mine. But put those two snakes inside the circle and I'll be happy to see the club drop."

And I nodded to where Fincer now stood beside the witch-doctor.

De la Rue did not seem to be heeding me. He softly cried:

"Ah! Another looks into the mad woman's eyes and passes the club. I do believe the Englishman has a chance to live until we reach Kuskuski."

So the club slowly traveled around the circle, some dropping it, some passing it. The last man to receive the club held it high in the air and every savage leaned forward, some eager to see it drop, others willing it should register a vote for delay. Mad Mercy twisted about to glare at the man. Instead of permitting the club

to fall the man slowly and gently lowered it to the ground. He had voted for delay. There were fourteen warriors in the circle. The vote was a tie.

Having lost five warriors by violence, De la Rue must have realized his influence over the savages was greatly lessened. Doubtless this, coupled to his desire to secure handsome ransom money, was the reason why he drew a deep breath of relief as White Canoe stood up and sullenly announced the result.

White Canoe turned on us and demanded that the mad woman be taken away so the prisoner could be painted. This was repeated to me by De la Rue as I appeared to have some influence with the unfortunate creature.

I entered the circle, touched her shoulder, and told her—

"Your sister and Ann want you."

She shook her head stubbornly. Arlington, ignorant of what passing the club signified, did not look up, but whispered—

"Remember your promise, Mr. Case."

"You are safe till we reach the Indian village. Something may happen to extend your safety before we sight Kuskuski."

Up came the handsome head as he murmured:

"Traitor or what-not— Nolton or Case or whatever your name may be, you've acted kindly to me,"

"Miss Ann is crying," I whispered to Mercy.

Now she came to her feet readily enough and without appearing to see the savages scuttling from her path she ran back to the women. I followed her to explain the situation to the Beverlys.

The girl lifted her white face for a moment, or long enough to see Arlington was not with us, then buried it in her mother's lap again and was convulsed by her half-stifled sobbing. Mrs. Beverly turned her implacable eyes on me and said:

"Now I understand about poor sister. I'll go that way, I hope. Oh, for an ax and room to swing it!"

This frenzied mood quickly passed as she gazed down on her daughter's head.

"Must we be here?" she whispered. The girl heard and moaned most pitiably.

"No harm will come to Arlington," I hurriedly told them. "He will be safe till we reach Kuskuski, perhaps to Sawcunk. Before that much may happen."

"Why lie to poor defenseless women?" said Mrs. Beverly, and the light in her eyes was much like that in Mercy's. "Even now they're painting him!"

"They will paint but half of his face to show the vote was even. Half for and half against. He will suffer no hurt, and will soon be back here with you."

The girl's head came up slowly and she stared at me as if to try to read my thoughts. In a broken voice she began—

"If you can save my mother—"

She did not finish.

"The three of you women will be safe. Either Arlington or some of the French will gladly ransom you and allow you to return home."

"Home!" dully repeated Mrs. Beverly.

"Kill 'em! Kill 'em! Kill all of 'em!" screamed Mercy, and she would have returned to the savages had not Mrs. Beverly caught her by the arm and said soothingly:

"Yes, yes, Mercy. And I won't ever try to hush you again. You was always right, dear. But you stay along with us now."

I hastened to rejoin De la Rue and observed that in my absence Phindry had gained his ear and was talking rapidly. Near-by stood Fincer. The Frenchman appeared to be perplexed and kept shifting his gaze from the witch-doctor to the sergeant and back again.

I called out—

"He dreads the word your runner will bring back from De Niverville, m'sieur."

"—— you! I only ask to be taken to De Niverville!" passionately retorted Phindry. "He's received too much important information from me to be taken in by a —— impostor."

"Chavert's belt to Tamaque will be rather hard to explain, I imagine," I reminded.

Before he could explode again De la Rue was warning:

"Softly, messieurs. How many times must you be told it is bad for you if the savages see you quarreling? The three of you shall have justice, never doubt that. It may lead one, or two, to the stake. But the three of you shall have what you deserve—gold and praise or a hot fire. France pays well for good deeds. She pays richly for evil. You have my mind in a whirl. M'sieur Arlington is an honest man. I doubt you three in turn. I ask you to keep away from each other. If you do not the savages will end your quarreling by roasting the three of you."

Smiling slightly Phindry boasted:

"I have an advantage over this —— impostor in that direction. White Canoe believes in me."

"White Canoe will burn you, m'sieur, with great joy, once he knows you go to the stake. Be polite. Your hate for each other need lose nothing by waiting a bit— Ah! They've finished their painting at last."

Arlington stood up, one half of his face painted the color of blood. He started to rejoin the women but White Canoe seized him by the shoulder and violently hurled him in the opposite direction. He fell heavily and bruised the unpainted side of his face.

Mercy witnessed this brutality and with a shrill scream came to her feet and ran toward us. The savages at once retired and I advanced and propped Arlington in a sitting posture with his back to a tree. Then I went to Mercy and again induced her to go to her sister. My influence over her was not lost on the savages.

Phindry was quick to realize this and to show he was similarly favored he ran after her and rested a hand on her shoulder. As soon as she recognized him she was screaming and spitting, kicking his legs and declaring her intentions to kill him.

The man's round face was murderous, and had he done as he lusted he would have brained her on the spot. He withdrew, discomfited.

Now that the deer meat was cooked the prisoners were left alone. I secured some pieces of bark, put meat on each and took them to the three women. I warned the Beverlys to feed Mercy, but not to untie her hands. Neither spoke a word to me.

I carried a portion to Arlington and called on the Frenchman to loosen his hands so he could feed himself. De la Rue approached and freed one hand and stood beside him while he ate a few mouthfuls and then trussed him up again.

Securing a portion for myself, I ate it while walking toward the east side of the camp. I turned back to the light on observing two savages ranging along on each side of me and did not leave the fire again.

With hands and knives the Indians were fishing out pieces of meat and eating like wolves. Phindry and Fincer kept near them and talked much together. The bottoms of the kettles were reached when a shrill signal in the northeast brought every warrior to his feet.

De la Rue, who had kept apart from us three white men, now walked by me and said:

"Black Feather comes back from where M'sieur Case said the belt-carrier was killed."

But what puzzled me and puzzled all was the sound of hoofs. The savages treed themselves.

De la Rue exclaimed:

"*Diable!* Men on horseback!"

And he ran to snatch up his gun.

"There are only two horses!" I called out.

He listened and repeated my words to the savages, but they remained under cover.

"Does it mean a rescue, Case?" inquired Arlington, leaning forward and hungrily watching for the riders to enter the small opening.

"The savages' first act would be to kill their prisoners," I replied, and I started to stand by the women.

Now the horsemen were finishing the

slight slope and were openly approaching the fires. I caught their guttural voices in conversation and knew they were red.

Then they rode into the light. I gaped in astonishment at the freshly painted face of Giga-tsuhli. Beside him rode Black Feather.

The latter leaped from his horse and loudly called out to his hidden companions. The Indians emerged from hiding and pressed around the two men.

The Frenchman listened to the talk between Black Feather and his companions and translated into French:

"Two horses. That is good. Black Feather says he has brought us a runaway Cherokee fighting man who found the horses in the valley near the cabin."

I did not know how to act. Both Fincer and Phindry knew Bloody-Mouth to be my friend. The Beverly women knew he was with me just before Phindry and Beverly and the Frenchman showed themselves at the north end of the meadow. I was undecided whether to recognize him or meet him as a stranger. The women would say nothing, and I was perfectly willing to denounce as lies anything the witch-doctor and the sergeant said.

Bloody-Mouth settled the matter by coming to me and giving me his hand and saying in English:

"Giga-tsuhli found what his brother sent him to find. Forbes' army will be crossing the mountains in ten sleeps. His scouts will be here in three sleeps."

"What's this?" cried De la Rue. "You two know each other?"

"It is a very important talk Giga-tsuhli, an outcast from the Cherokee nation, brings," I cried, as if excited by the manufactured news. "This man of the Wolf Clan says Forbes' army will cross the mountains in ten days."

Phindry tore through the group, screaming:

"—— and ——! How much longer is this man to tell his lies? The Cherokee was with him at Chambers' Fort. Both are scouts for Forbes."

Bloody-Mouth took my hand again and this time I felt something pressing into my palm. Still holding my hand, he said in the Mohawk dialect:

"This man is bad flesh to have in this camp." And he slowly relinquished my hand and pointed at Phindry, thereby distracting all attention from me. "This man works with a black spirit. His tongue is always crooked. Giga-tsuhli was with his white brother, who sent him to find the English army and bring a talk about it."

Although I believed the Frenchman had understood Bloody-Mouth's talk I repeated it in French. De la Rue glared at me suspiciously.

"This is a bad puzzle, m'sieur," he finally said, and quieted Phindry's frenzied accusations with an imperative gesture. "My mind is very uneasy."

"He brings you intelligence of General Forbes' movements. Has Phindry or the man Fincer brought any such important news?"

"Important if true," he mumbled. For the original doubt of me persisted in his mind, and the coming of the Cherokee was accentuating it. "Why should Phindry and the other man come to us if they are not friendly to us?"

"They didn't intend to come to you. You surprized them. You went to them. As for that, why did I come to you if I am an enemy of France? Why does this Cherokee, cast out by his own people, come to you?"

"Devil boil it all in one kettle!" he angrily cried. "I do not know. It is true we happened to meet Phindry and the man we killed, and that you came when you did not need to do so. But Phindry has sent us information for two years."

"Sent what he was told by English officers to send," I laughed. "Why didn't he bring word about the army moving?"

"If it is moving," he murmured.

"Easily proven! Send scouts across the mountains to the Conococheague valley. They will meet the scouts far ahead of the army. The scouts may be in this valley to-morrow."

"No! no! My children will not fight the head of the army. If the news is true it must reach Duquesne quickly. If false, there's nothing gained by waiting here for my scouts to report. De Niverville shall handle the whole matter.

"We start early in the morning. I will send a runner ahead—but, head of wood!— I am forgetting."

He called for Black Feather and, as the young man came through the curious, expectant circle, the Frenchman talked to him at some length.

The young man replied, and the pantomime of his hands gave me a hint of the subject. After he finished and stepped back into the circle I asked—

"He found the dead man as I said he would?"

De la Rue nodded slowly and rubbed his head and darted a quick glance at Phindry.

"Yes, in the sumac bushes. But he says the belt-carrier was chewed by wolves. He could not tell if the wound killed at once. In fairness to you, m'sieur, I will say Black Feather believes the carrier of belts lived after being struck down."

"He surely did, or else his ghost talked to me."

"It is a sad tangle. I will smoke alone." And he withdrew to one side and lighted his pipe.

TO BE CONTINUED

BY CAPTAIN DINGLE

Than whom few men know the sea better

Hellbuster Doova

HE WAS blue-eyed, straw-haired and stolid. Not one thing about him suggested justification for his nickname. He had all the attributes of Runeberg's famous hero, even to his real name. He brought from his homeland town of Hango the fine old name of Sven Dufva, and, landing in San Francisco out of a hard-case Russian bark, knew just as much of the English language as he had been able to acquire from the companionship of the lone Yankee able seaman in the forecastle. He had heard all about the big land to the west.

Wages there were more, for deepwater foremast hands, than the skipper of the Russian bark received. Sven liked money. Money would take care of him in his old age and also would buy him the favors of pretty girls in his youth; only he must not buy too many of the latter for fear of losing all chance of the other. But the Yankee sailor had told him that it was essential that he speak the language, at least enough to understand orders, so to that end he strove to learn and in return gave Yank his only bit of valuable gear—a wonderful pair of hand-made boots of leather soft as silk, stitched with a cunning and adorned with an art he would never see in the swifter, busier land he was bound for.

It was queer that he picked up the language so well, for he was not noticeably smart otherwise. But learn it he did, and when he turned about and looked for a ship among the big grain fleet lying in the Bay he could tell the mate what he wanted quite intelligibly. He had learned things about American ships besides wages. He had been assured by Yank that a Yankee bloodboat was something to be steered clear of, if there was anything else going. And he found out

that the scale of wages ruling in the port at the time applied to ships of any flag taking on men there. So after all it was in a big four-masted Scotch bark, loaded with barley for the Continent, that he shipped as able seaman. He began to spend the night before sailing in a delightful fashion, counting up the wages for the passage and converting it into Finnish marks.

When the sum had reached proportions that induced dreams of grandeur, the only other man remaining in the forecastle called across the big bare space:

"Come on for a run ashore, 'Dutchy.' We'll see enough o' this 'ole before we make our number."

Sven only understood some of those words, for Ben Todd spoke pure cockney, which was as different from Yank's speech as a different language. But the intent was clear and Sven was a companionable soul. He swung on his peaked cap and followed Todd out, smiling a slow colorful smile, his lurching, swinging gait in keen contrast to the smart snappy step of the little cockney.

"I got to get a few things, then we'll 'ave one beer apiece, and finish up at the Mission. They give out cawfee and cake at eight," Ben Todd suggested. Sven smiled agreement.

"Ay like cawfee ant cake," he said musically.

The cockney chattered on, some of his words getting through to Sven's understanding. He said that he had completed his time; that is, he had served out his indentures, in the ship while in San Francisco and was going home as able seaman. The money would help him when he went up for his certificate. He liked the *Osprey*. She was a fine, easy going old bark, good in bad weather, feeding well enough and never far behind the first ships to arrive home. Sven understood enough but he was only gathering in Ben's first sentences when the little cockney had finished chattering and disappeared in a store doorway. Sven absorbed the rest while waiting outside, and about the time they were standing at the bar of a beer saloon he had digested the fact that the *Osprey* might be expected to make the passage home in a hundred days or less. So his beer scarcely tasted as well as it might, had he not been altering his calculations of wealth to be taken up on paying off.

"It is a lot ov money," he grinned.

Ben stared at him. The only money in sight was the ten cents lying on the bar waiting for the barman to take it.

"Beer ain't cheaper than that where you come from, is it?" Ben demanded. "Big scoops like this?"

"Ay was not t'inking ov beer," smiled Sven.

They went to the mission. They had cake and coffee, sang hymns, listened to the missioner talking a while, and went aboard their ship. Sven was still singing part of the last hymn in his own peculiar way, when Ben turned down the lamp. And in the morning, when the watchman brought a kettle of coffee and woke the hands to get the anchor, Sven was already singing.

"Queer, ain't he?" a new hand growled.

"He's all right," retorted Ben Todd. "Any drunk can go to bed singin' but it takes a blessed good man to wake up singin'. Leave him be."

"Never heerd no singin' like that before," the man grumbled.

Outside, as the men huddled around the handspike racks waiting for the mate to lead them to the capstan, Sven was still singing. It was scarcely light. But he could be discerned standing erect supported by his handspike, with head thrown back and straw hair blowing in the cold morning breeze, swaying as he sang. Nobody could make out the words of the verse, but the chorus was always the same and part of it suggested words.

"Hellbuster doova teengs ve shoot,
Ta be ta oders kin' an' goot—"

The tune was familiar to Ben Todd. He called to Sven:

"I say, Dutchy, you ain't 'alf got yer

words balled up. What d'ye think y're singin'?"

"It is a song for me," smiled Sven simply. "It is my name, Dufva. Ay sing it."

"Hellbuster doova—"

The cockney laughed. He knew that song now. They had sung it together last night at the mission. He volunteered to render it as was intended:

"Help us to do the things we should,
To be to others kind and good—"

"Ya, that is right," cried Sven, eagerly. "Hellbuster doova—"

"Start to heave in, there!" bawled the mate, striding forward.

The men gathered around and stuck their bars into the capstan, waiting for somebody to start a chantey. But Sven Dufva had earned himself a name that stuck to him like pitch. "Hellbuster Doova" he was.

There was little of the hellbuster about him though. He was always behind—thought and action. Even now, when every other man holding a handspike had already stuck the squared end into the capstan head and braced himself to heave, Sven only got the significance of the order. When he reached the capstan there was no room for his bar.

"Hey, slowcoach, put that bar in the rack again, and you double up with somebody," the mate growled.

The morning was cold and Mr. Dean's blood had scarcely commenced to circulate. Sven got back to the job and laid hold of another man's bar. He still grinned over "slowcoach." It was a new name. Sven grinned at anything new. The pilot was aboard, the tug at the bow.

"Come, sing, somebody!" growled Mr. Dean.

Ben Todd raised his head and started:

"Oh, don't you hear the Old Man say,
Good-by, fare ye well, good-by, fare ye well.
We're homeward bound from 'Frisco Bay,
Hoorah, my lads, we're homeward bound!"

Sven put his lusty young weight to the bar. He sang behind all the rest. Ben Todd was already midway of the next line before Sven roared out his "Goot-by, far' yu vell, goot-by, far' yu vell!" but the headachy, sore, fumble-footed man whose bar Sven doubled on was not critical; Sven heaved for both of them, his straw hair all blowing, his blue eyes all alight, giving the best that was in him and smiling too.

So in making sail. The men who went aloft to cast loose the gaskets on the mainmast and the boys who took the mizzen were crossing the respective tops before Sven had clambered over the sheerpole of the fore rigging. But once Sven Dufva got to work, he did it in proper sea fashion, smartly and well. His young strength applied to a rope or any other, work made every other man's work easier. On that first morning at sea, when the harbor litter of three months had to be cleaned up, men who had never seen each other before had to get acquainted and names were bestowed that must last for the passage. As soon as the sun warmed the air, setting blood moving in men's veins, surliness wore off in such men as were not ordinarily surly. Mr. Dean growled good-naturedly at Sven for his slowness, calling him slowcoach, but quick to detect the good qualities underlying the lad's slowness. Ben Todd called his chum Hellbuster and the mate grinned with relish. Thereafter only the captain deigned to use any name other than Hellbuster.

Out past the Farralones sped the *Osprey*, piling up foam at her stem and leaving astern of her a broad creamy wake all bubbles and gleam. Just at the last minute before sailing the agent had sent down fifty carboys of acid, to be landed in the Falkland Islands. This was a cargo welcomed by no shipmaster; a curse to any first mate. But there it was, and it must be stowed securely somewhere on deck, where seas could not break the carboys, and in a way that was secure against shifting. Hellbuster was with the gang stowing the acid under direction

of the mate. Between the spare topmast and the bulwarks, along the port waterways, Mr. Dean chose to stow the perilous stuff, and Chips made blocks of wood for the carboys to stand on, so that the water that came aboard might run freely beneath.

"Look out for that one! It's leaked a bit," the mate cried as Hellbuster seized a carboy and kneed it to the block. A little trickle, almost dried, ran from the plug and Hellbuster's hand touched it. For a moment or two the lad just blinked at it, wondering what was stinging him. He set the carboy in place, and stared at his hand, then up at the anxious mate.

"It is hot!" he grinned, and stared at his burned hand again.

"You'd better believe it's hot, m'lad. Any time you see one o' those things carry away, don't stop to look, but jump clear o' the deck, or you'll have no feet to dance with when you get back home."

IN THE forecastle, all hands eating supper together since watches were not yet picked, men jeered at Hellbuster.

"S' blasted slow he never felt acid burnin' him!" said one man, taking the thicker of two remaining pieces of cold beef.

There was only Hellbuster to share. It seemed a safe thing to do. Hellbuster grinned, and took the last ration. He made up for its thinness by taking two whole pantiles and clapping the beef between them. Men who had been willing to join in the jeering, glanced warily at the smiling young viking biting through two flinty pantiles and a slab of tough beef with no more effort than if they had been two thin wafers of buttered bread with a leaf of lettuce between.

"You leave him alone," Ben Todd advised, shortly. "You'd ha' dropped it, quick. He finished the job."

"Who th' —— are you, buttin' in?" growled the man.

"Name's Ben Todd. If you want my card, come out on the hatch and get it," Ben retorted.

He had spent four good long years in the *Osprey's* half-deck, and had seen a good many forecastle crowds in that time. There was always one fellow who tried to get the jump over his mates at the start of a passage. Sometimes the man was able, and maintained his advantage. But sometimes he was just a bluff. It was a gamble; a worth-while gamble to a sportsman, and Ben Todd was a sportsman. This man, Tyrone he was called, made no sign of willingness to meet Ben on the hatch.

Then watches were picked and set. Ben Todd was the first pick of the mate, who knew his worth from four years of experience. Hellbuster was first choice of the second mate, who had seen him working, and knew nothing of his slow mental processes. In any case Mr. Bard was young and cocky. He valued beef in a seaman, claiming that he himself had brains enough for his watch—the less a man thought the better. And Tyrone also went into the starboard watch with Hellbuster.

Through the night watches the big ship roared through softly curling seas with a steady breeze that permitted every stitch of canvas to draw well. Hellbuster established himself as a dependable helmsman, even to Mr. Bard's approval. There were fewer men each succeeding voyage who could steer a big steel four-master deep laden. With great stars overhead, and just enough tang in the breeze to keep a man moving, Sven enjoyed those hours of darkness when he was neither on lookout nor at the wheel. He could pleasantly count up the money coming to him. When he returned to Frisco— But he soon put that thought aside with a grin. He had seen a girl there, but had not been in funds. Of course she would still be there when he came back with money. That was Hellbuster's way. Slow, but sure. He didn't mind having to leave without making her acquaintance. He would come back—there would be another day.

In the morning Tyrone made his play to establish himself cock of his watch.

"Here, you, go git the grub," he growled at Hellbuster.

There were no ordinary seamen or boys in that forecastle. The men would take turns at "Peggy," day by day, or week by week as agreed. But before Hellbuster realized that he was being imposed upon, he was well on his way to the galley. And once started he went on, carrying back the mess-kid and kettle, singing the song that had so fascinated him at the mission—

"Hellbuster doova teengs ve shoot—"

But when he had planted the breakfast on the board table that was pegged to a couple of stanchions, he stopped singing long enough to tell Tyrone pleasantly:

"Ay t'ink ve take torn ant torn wit' ta Peggy. Ay do it today, ant not more for one week."

And he went on singing—

"Ta be ta oders kin' ant goot—"

Tyrone was scarcely ready for that kind of response. He had seen Hellbuster allow Ben Todd to stand up for him without protest the previous day, and had taken it for granted that the young Finn was no fighting man. Hellbuster had been the second mate's first pick in the watch. That alone was cause for jealousy. Tyrone could kill two gulls with one bone by setting the youngster in his proper place at the start. He could assert his own rights as leader of the watch and, happy thought, settle upon Hellbuster the job of Peggy for the passage. None of his watchmates could object to that.

"Stow that yelpin' when I'm talkin' to you, squarehead," snarled Tyrone. He gripped the lad by the shirt bosom and swung him around. "What's that about not doin' no more Peggy for a week?"

"Ay say it s'all be torn ant torn about," Hellbuster smiled, gently twisting Tyrone's fingers loose from his shirt, and pouring his pannikin full of coffee with supreme placidity.

Tyrone heard his mates snicker. His position was in the balance. He knocked the pannikin from Dufva's hand, scattering hot drops all around, and gripped the empty hand while Dufva still stared down at it as if wondering where the pannikin had vanished to. Then, tremendously, Tyrone punched Hellbuster three times full in the face. For an instant the forecastle was hushed. Tyrone stood prepared, but his victim only stood there looking pained, gently rubbing his bruised face and looking at his hand as if expecting to find pieces coming loose. Men settled themselves to eat, grunting their opinions of any man who would take a slapping like that. Tyrone shoved himself into a place, grinning, sure now of supremacy in the starboard watch, and, to make his conquest complete, he kicked the lad's pannikin through the door and out on deck.

Hellbuster slowly went out and retrieved his tin mug, while his mates jeered at him. He hung it by the hook to the board of his bunk, and, to the breathless amazement of his mates, reached out and gripped Tyrone by the hair, and hauled him from his seat with staggering ease. His fresh-colored, simple face was turning blue from the blows he had taken. But his clear blue eyes were unwinking and unangered, rather they held surprize, and Tyrone's eyes held surprize too, for he was pulled irresistibly to the breast of Hellbuster, and punch as he might and did, at that blue-eyed youthful face, those powerful arms held him like steel bands and crushed the breath from him. Soon he stopped punching.

"Lemme loose! Lemme loose, 'fore I put a head on yuh!" he panted.

"Ay will poot a het on yu forst," stated Hellbuster calmly.

And with a cunning wrestling trick he lifted Tyrone from the forecastle floor, swung him heels up, and banged his head slowly and stolidly against the table stanchion many times, once for each punch he had received. Then he dropped him, and announced unhurriedly as he took a place at the table—

"Ay t'ink we take torn ant torn about wit' ta Peggy."

"Sure, cully! That's proper," agreed the man nearest him.

"Never know'd no other fashion, I never," another chimed in.

"Watch out fer Tyrone, buddy," muttered an old fellow. "He'll get hunk wit' ya."

"Tyrone s'all be Peggy for Saturday," Hellbuster said placidly, and Tyrone signified that he heard by a muttered but scorching oath. Saturday was the day when the forecastle must be thoroughly cleaned out. The mate would inspect it on Sunday morning.

HONEST though he was, that brief assumption of leadership was only a bluff, for Hellbuster had absolutely nothing of the bully in his make-up. By the time Saturday came around, he had forgotten that he ever had trouble with Tyrone. He reveled in the every-day life of the big ship, so different from that of the little, mean, hard-case Russian bark he had gone out in. In the sunshiny days that never changed clear down to the Line and the southern tropic, he smiled and sang and cheerily worked his watches. He was a fine picture of a Norseman as he stood at the helm, hair flying, eyes shining, strong as a young oak and graceful as a palm. In the short squalls of the variables, when royals were often furled for brief half hours, he would breast the yard, gathering up the canvas in his great arms, and roar fragments of weird old sagas that seemed to melt into the very howling of the squalls themselves. And when the squalls had passed, and the royals were set again, his was the loudest, lustiest shout in the chanty chorus.

"Oh, whisky is the life of man," the chanteyman sang, and—

"Visky, Yonny!" Hellbuster would roar.

"I drink whisky when I can—"

"Oh, visky for me Yonny!"

His mates laughed at him, liking him. Even Tyrone found it to his advantage to be decent to Hellbuster, for the lad was just a good-natured generous simpleton. He would stand a fellow's lookout without a grumble; he could do any difficult bit of sailoring, and there were plenty such in the big four-masted bark, with her steel masts and steel rigging. As long as work was to do, he did it without thought or care of time. He was imposed upon, oh yes. But he never realized it until long afterward, and then his good-tempered grin was at himself.

It was Mr. Bard who never quite understood Hellbuster. There was no better helmsman in the ship. There was only one better sailor, and that was little Ben Todd who had grown up in the ship for four years and knew every strand and thread of her gear. But Hellbuster could never get moving quickly enough for the second mate. There was no bodily sluggishness but simply a tardiness of mental grasp. The common routine work was done as smartly by Hellbuster as by anybody. But if an order were shouted it was never Hellbuster who started first in answer. If several orders were given rapidly, invariably he was still working at one job when his mates had left it for another.

"—— smart old soldier, you are, m' lad," Mr. Bard remarked once. "Watch yourself, or I'll try working you up."

Hellbuster stared after the departing officer. There was innocent trouble in his blue eyes. He knew what old soldier meant, as applied to a seaman. And he was no old soldier. Everybody but the second mate knew that. Even the skipper had said Sven Dufva was a good sailorman. But, as usual, by the time Hellbuster had grasped what was said to him, and was ready to deny the accusation, Mr. Bard was at the poop ladder again and out of reach.

The *Osprey* encountered no evil weather. Picking up a strong breeze that settled squarely abeam, she held a steamboat course and made steamboat speed through blue seas that only smiled after her though she had shattered them.

Those were days to make a sailor forget Old Stiff; to write home urging younger brothers to come to sea. Pleasant-weather jobs patching sales, making rovings to be used in worse weather to come, strengthening the hold of sail to jackstay and, less pleasant, yet still pleasant-weather jobs, chipping rusty stanchions and plates, and tarring down rigging. The captain spent long hours in a deck-chair on the poop, under a specially rigged awning, coloring a fine meerschaum pipe and reading formidable-looking books. He appeared to be interested in watching Hellbuster Doova whenever that cheery youth was steering.

As for Hellbuster, he had the time of his life at the helm of the big ship. Once given the course to steer he had to think of nothing but that; no changes, no contradictory orders, no interference. And he fancied himself master of that huge tall fabric of steel and canvas. He felt her quiver under the tremendous thrust of those four lofty masts, full clothed with their thirty-four straining sails. In the gurgle and swish of swirling seas leaving the clean run and twisting at the rudder in passing, he heard the lureful voices of pretty girls, laughing, singing, all for him. In the hollow smash of the bow sea, and the smoky upfling of the spray over the forecastle head he saw the distant gun-fire of old sea fights, through which he guided triumphantly this tremendous sea creature that so docilely obeyed his will. Upon every yard-arm and truck there was a smiling, blue-eyed cherub beckoning him on to great deeds. In the sibilant, long-drawn-out ripple of the sea lipping the under edge of the leeward plating as the ship leaned to a harder thrust, he knew he could recognize the whispering converse of heroes long gone to Tuonela talking about him.

Once the captain closed his book, holding a finger between the pages, and looked for a long time at Hellbuster. And when he took up his reading again there was a queer sort of a ghost of humorous conjecture playing about his features. But Hellbuster finished his trick, was relieved, and went forward all unconscious of his captain's interest. He sang a famous old sea song as he cut up tobacco for his pipe, and, standing there on the dark forecastle floor, touched fleetingly by a vivid stab of sunlight through a port-hole as the ship rolled gently, he looked like one of the heroes from Tuonela, reincarnated and proud of the new sphere to which he had been called.

"I say, Hellbuster, can't you let blokes sleep?" grumbled Ben Todd, of the watch below, resenting the unguarded singing.

"Hey, you, how much longer d'ye want for a smoke afore yuh turn to?" the boatswain demanded, poking in his head from the deck. "Yuh been sojerin' there nigh arf an hour and the second mate's gettin' ready to take yuh down, me son."

Hellbuster went to work; and his shipmates chaffed him, saying that the look in his blue eyes was goofy love for some seaport Judy. But it was not. Hellbuster knew it was not.

EVERY day the mate scrutinized every part of the upper rigging through binoculars. Once a week he personally climbed aloft on all four masts and looked the gear over more closely. It was the modest boast of Mr. Dean that the *Osprey* had never lost a spar since he joined her. It was the quiet boast of the captain that he had the best managed ship and the finest chief mate going under canvas.

The breeze hardened one early morning, and in the second mate's watch the royals were taken in. Halyards were let go, sheets eased and clew-lines manned.

"A hand apiece and tie 'em up!" cried Mr. Bard briskly.

He glanced all around the horizon, hoping that the mounting sun would give indication of returning fine weather. Bringing back his gaze to the ship he saw a man crossing the foretop on his way to the foreroyal yard, another man halfway up the mizzen lower rigging, and

Hellbuster just reaching for a hold on the main sheerpole.

"I'll make you jump when you come down!" shouted Mr. Bard, and vowed dire things because Hellbuster only grinned at him.

The mate came up with his glasses to make his daily examination of the rigging, and overheard Mr. Bard's soulful comments. He smiled as he looked aloft. Hellbuster was as far ahead of the other two men now as he had been behind them at starting.

"—— sojer!" growled the second mate.

"I wish I had a watch of sojers, then," the mate returned.

He focussed his binoculars upon the jigger-topmast head, and slowly swept his eye downward, looking for ravelings and chafed service. Then the same with the mizzen. And the main. The royals were still flogging gently, restrained by the gear. Hellbuster was on his yard, and had most of the bunt of the sail picked up while on fore and mizzen his mates were just dragging in the leeches. The second mate caught a glimpse of the windward sky which promised well, and sang out:

"Hold on with those royals! Mainroyal there! Cast off that gasket, and stand by to overhaul the gear. On deck there, masthead those yards again."

The mate held his glasses focussed upon the mainroyal yard. The sail, released from the buntline, with clew-lines started from the deck, filled with wind and billowed out, while Hellbuster in his slow thinking way still held on to the gasket. Mr. Dean suddenly lowered his glasses with a shout:

"Hold on all with that mainroyal! 'Loft there, get in off that yard!" In explanation for interference with the second mate's affairs, he told him: "The parral's gone. It's parted. See? Let go, you Dutchman! Let go of it!"

The two mates gazed aloft. The mainroyal yard, lowered to the extreme length of the tie, was only held in to the mast by the parral and braces. The braces were slack, preparatory to hoisting again The parral, a band of iron and leather, was broken almost in two. The moment it broke completely the yard with its wind-filled sail would be jerked forward and become a thing of potential havoc, both to the lighter spars and to others that were stayed in combination with them; to say nothing of men who might be clinging to anything that parted. The captain had come on deck for his morning glance around, to find all hands waiting for Hellbuster to fall. One look up there revealed all the skipper needed to know. His smart ship was going to lose some spars, that was certain, unless somebody snapped out of the general standstill and acted swiftly. Hellbuster had just absorbed the order to get in off the yard. It had just come to his consciousness that his perch was perilous. And he began to move.

"Mainroyal! Hold on there! Catch a turn with a gasket around the mast! Quick, or you'll lose me that yard!"

That was the captain bawling. He hated to lose that spar. The mate, swift to sense the trouble that would follow if the yard were allowed to go, ran to the halyards and made men haul for their lives to masthead the yard again, while the hands at the sheets were made to let go. The second mate had men already at the braces, keeping the yard as tightly against the mast as possible until the halyards brought it to the sheave, when it would be restrained at least to the few inches of play allowed by the natural slack of the wire. But the big thing to do was the very simplest, and the captain had seen it. If Hellbuster, already up there, simply flung the end of his gasket around the mast and yard, and hauled it taut, that yard was safe. Men would soon be up there and preventer gear could hold it until Chips made a new parral.

But Hellbuster never got that last order until the parral snapped. He was coming in off the yard, as last ordered. As he swung out on the backstays, feeling for the head of the topgallant rigging

with his feet, the royal yard flipped from the mast and the terrific flogging dragged the halyards from men's hands on deck. There was a moment of freedom, and first the braces parted, then the lifts, the yard whanged back against the mast, and one end jolted Hellbuster from his hold. First he fell. Then the yard broke in two. And the people on deck dodged whatever might come down. When anybody looked up again, Hellbuster sat unhurt astride the topgallant yard, staring upward. The royal yard had javelined down through the galley roof, breaking a boat and filling the doctor's fuel bunkers with unchopped wood, besides spoiling the men's breakfast.

"You wooden man! Oh, you blockhead!" the skipper raved, while mates and men labored with the wreckage.

"Get a move on there!" the mate howled at Hellbuster as he dropped out of the rigging to the deck with a vacant grin. "Hop in and clear that yard from the galley. It had to be you to lose me the first spar I lost in the ship!"

It was noon before the carpenter finished fitting the new yard. It was evening before the royal was set again; and the ship had lost many a mile. The mate had lost his fine opinion of Hellbuster. The second mate had seen his opinion justified and had lost no time in telling his superior officer about it. The captain soon forgot his annoyance, confident that his ship would recover the loss of mere miles. But the men of the forecastle forgot nothing. That had been a day of soul-dragging labor. All hands—not a spell. And all because of that Finn's crippled wit that made him slower than Stockholm tar in a July blizzard off Cape Stiff.

"When the mate hollered to let go o' the yard, the squarehead was just gettin' the order to go up to it. An' when the Old Man bellered to chuck a turn 'round it, as 'ud ha' saved all hands a mess o' trouble, you wos proper ready to leggo, you long fadom o' wind!" snarled Tyrone, bold again in Hellbuster's disgrace. Even Ben Todd must have his little gibe—

"If you don't watch out, chummy, you'll be asking the doctor for duff on Monday, then you'll have a battle on hand."

Hellbuster knew there was something amiss. There had been little spite in the jesting of his shipmates since that first day when Tyrone made his play for leadership of the watch after having declined Ben Todd's challenge for leadership of the forecastle. Now men who had rather feared him since his manhandling of Tyrone began to try horse-play on him. Tyrone, wondrous civil before, essayed to handle the lad again. And Hellbuster never retaliated as he had before. It seemed as if he realized that he had done something not quite worthy of admiration. And, as long as only a joke were meant, he was as slow to protest as he was in other ways. It was Tyrone who first overstepped bounds to a vicious degree—as Tyrone would. Hellbuster came to Tyrone one dog-watch half an hour after receiving a wallop that made his eyes water.

"Ay t'ink yu are so slow as me," Hellbuster said slowly. "Ta forst day out yu poonch me like that. Ta forst day is gone."

"Now what th' ——'s he mean?" Tyrone demanded of others who stood by.

But they could not tell him, though they had their ideas. Hellbuster had never altered a bit from that first day out, in spite of the change in officers and men toward him. He was still the same willing shipmate. He still smiled patiently and cheerily in all circumstances. Some of the men had let up on him very soon. Only men like Tyrone and the second mate seemed incapable of letting go of the one peg they had found to hang torment upon. And even Tyrone was not so ready to lay his hands on Hellbuster after that brief and peaceful encounter when the lad protested in words only.

"It's time you fellows gave him a rest," Ben Todd told his watch one evening. "He's too decent a chap to keep after all the time."

And one sunny day, when the *Osprey* had more than made up any distance lost through Hellbuster, the captain closed his book and again sat covertly watching the tall young Finn at the helm. The captain had been reading a famous old book of Runeberg's Heroes. The name of the greatest hero was Sven Dufva, and the coincidence of names forced the captain to regard Hellbuster more closely.

Sven Dufva had been a soldier in his country's great war for liberty. He had earned a reputation. When drilling with other raw recruits, he was always behind the rest. Did the drill officer order shoulder arms, then ground arms, or present arms, or carry arms, Sven's musket invariably pointed in the opposite direction to all the rest. Yet he was an earnest young soldier, for he was above all things a true patriot, not in flag waving and shouting, but in deed. Some of his comrades were of the shouting sort. They shouted ribald things at him. Just as some men in the *Osprey's* forecastle shouted gibes at slow-thinking Hellbuster.

But one day a battle was fought. The fate of his country hung upon the issue. Worse, the fight was going all against his country's army. That part of the line he served in was ordered to advance and hold a vital bridge at all costs; but the enemy were so near, in such superior force, that Sven's general faltered and ordered the retreat. Then Sven Dufva became immortal, as Leonidas was immortalized at Thermopylæ. Sven was slow of comprehension. He grasped the order to advance and hold the bridge. That then was his duty. When his comrades started to retreat, Sven vaguely understood that another order had been given, but then he was at the bridge; the enemy were at the other end of it. What was he to do? He did his duty as he understood it. He spat on his hands, gripped his gun and bayonet, and set about the foe with such ferocity that they were halted for a moment. In that moment his commander saw the opportunity, and returned to the attack. Sven Dufva died there on the bridge, but he made a name which will always stand high in the annals of his little nation's heroic history. Nobody ever thinks of him as a slow-thinking lout. He will live as a hero, which undoubtedly he was.

The captain smiled and slowly shook his head, watching Hellbuster Doova at the wheel. Sven Dufva had achieved something by his slowness. Hellbuster only managed to save his skin through being behindhand. But the captain told the mate the story in brief. And the mate told the second mate, who told the senior apprentice, who told the boatswain, who told Chips, who told the doctor, who passed it along to the hands as they came to the galley for their hash. Thus Hellbuster attained new rank, with both watches. Mr. Dean was too dignified to join in such sport as jollying a seaman, but Mr. Bard, not long out of the half-deck himself, was not above reflecting the spirit of half-deck and forecastle and helping it along. Many an order he gave, followed by others so swiftly as to puzzle normal minds, just to see how inextricably tangled Hellbuster could get. And so long as the weather kept fine and the ship reeled off her comfortable two hundred miles a day, there was little harm in it. Hellbuster saw the other hands laughing, and laughed too. By the time he realized they were laughing at him the occasion was gone and he could laugh again.

"It's time you fellows gave him a rest," Ben Todd warned his watch again one day. "He's too good a bloke to badger."

Everybody got tired of badgering him. Hellbuster was always smiling, always ready and more than willing to help a shipmate out of trouble. His tobacco, his boots, were at the call of anybody. When Tyrone skoffed his whack of marmalade before midweek, and the steward discovered that half the flour was moldy and there would be no more soft tack for the forecastle except on Sundays, it was Hellbuster who scraped his whackpot into Tyrone's, simply saying that he couldn't eat marmalade.

"Just becos 'is nyme's ve syme as some —— story-book bloke as wos a joke, ain't no reason why all 'ands 'as to everlawstin' josh 'im, is it?" an old Limehouse relic wanted to know.

So from playing horse, they took to barely reminding him of his stumble-mindedness. And Hellbuster was the first and heartiest to laugh at the joke against himself.

"Sure, Ay am slow," he laughed. "Ta pay-day will be goot for yu fallers, so."

All the while the *Osprey* bustled her way south. On one sparkling day, when the horizon ahead seemed to be one marching rank of windy clouds, and the sun lighted the sea crests all gold and royal blue, two famous ships that had sailed two days before the *Osprey* were sighted hull down to leeward. With the ivory and mauve of their sails set like miniatures against the blue of the sky, and the fairylike hulls, seen from aloft, looking like carven models, set in opalescent glass, all slowly but inevitably slipping astern, the *Osprey* had little time for horseplay or play of any kind.

"Take the handy billy and sweat her up all round, Bosun," would be the order. Or, "Check in the upper yards a trifle, she'll like her head free."

Dolphins played about her blusterous bows. Flying-fish shot the warm air with silver darts. All the great involved structure of hemp and steel and wood and canvas sang in breeze and sunlight. And Hellbuster Doova, hearing all about the swift passage the ship was making, frowned and unwillingly rearranged his calculations of money to be taken up at the paying-off table.

THEN the breeze failed; calm came. No wind at all; a swell underrunning the ship. Roll, roll, roll. Clatter, clatter, clatter. Wash ports clanging. Bell jangling. Sails thundering hollowly with a sound like shaking gigantic carpets. Sheets and braces whanging like bow-strings. The wheel kicking fit to take the ribs out of a man. Roll, roll, roll!

"More days, more dollars," growled an old forecastle rat who knew only that moldy deepwater joke. He had pulled it for many a year past, but this was the only voyage in years that he remembered a friendly response.

"Ay t'ink yu are right. Ay will buy yu a drink at payoff," Hellbuster said.

"——, yer crazy!" the ancient retorted, surlily.

Nothing that ever swam the waters could roll like a big grain-laden steel windjammer in a calm with a deep-water swell running. Swoop and stagger; lift and reel; lazy sheets swishing in the sea, brine streaming from scuppers and back-ropes and bumpkins; smashing of seas beneath the counter as she settled; wheel spinning to every kick of the broken swell so that two helmsmen were knocked sick before the mate had tackles rigged and checked the wild antics.

Uproar in galley and pantry. Every loose bit of ship's furniture or stores carried away by her giddy performance. Paint and oil in the boatswain's storeroom capsized and mixed; tar and pitch and oakum and waste playing "I spy" with new rope and clean bolts of canvas. Skipper in his deck-chair on the poop, braced between the jigger mast and the forward rail, his book shut without a finger between the pages, his kindly humorous face rather pallid and uncertain. Two young apprentices frankly and unashamedly seasick. But over all a sky as blue as a Norse maiden's love-lit eyes. A sea that from horizon to horizon seemed to lie glassy as a mirror; yet on which the great steel four-master did things to be matched only by the antics of a channel buoy overrun by a liner.

"Bosun," the second mate called out. "Take some hands and wedge off the lashings around those acid carboys. Everything's slacked up with the dry spell."

Men approached the carboys gingerly. They remembered how Hellbuster got burned. The boatswain warned Hellbuster to watch out and he grinned knowingly, rubbing his hands together. The carboys stood in a row, each one lashed separately

but with turns of the same long line, three between stanchions, and at the center of the line the whole array was tied by a couple of heavy wedges between the bulwarks and the middle carboy. As long as the line was tight and the carboys remained unbroken, all was well. The slackened line could be hauled taut again, or additional wedges driven in to take care of the present danger.

"Hold on to that middle one and look out—" the second mate shouted from the poop. Then the captain's voice pealed out: he was on his feet, pointing to the top of the midship house, and he looked almost panicky:

"Stand clear, men! On the house! The spars!"

Along the roof of the house lay a bundle of spare spars; old skysail yards that never had been crossed, spare royal yards, and spencer gaffs. Their lashings too had slackened. More, they had carried away; the terrific rolling of the ship had just succeeded in starting them launching over the edge of the roof; and ten men stood on the deck, right where they must fall. Right in their path lay carboys of acid; and if one were smashed, the whole array would be unkeyed and start a devilish flood that must cripple every man it touched, if no worse.

"Get away, men! Stand clear for your lives!" yelled the second mate, seeing the danger now and running along the monkey bridge in a mad effort to reach the house before the spars finally fell.

"Get out o' that, you Hellbuster!" cried the skipper. "Oh my lord!"

He groaned, and gripped the rail to support himself as the *Osprey* rolled twice as she never rolled before. Once—twice—and down clattered the spars. The second mate hung over the monkey bridge rail, his face a mask of impending tragedy. All hands had run. Some hopped on to the fore fiferail, some on to the hatch, some simply ran. All except Hellbuster Doova. He had been ordered to hold onto that middle carboy, and he was just doing that very thing, cautiously avoiding the plug and possible leaks. Succeeding orders had not yet got to his understanding, when down came the spars about him. One butt end thumped him on the head. He rubbed his head and looked surprized. Then another spar crashed down on the carboy he held, smashing the crate box and heavy glass and unkeying the whole line. Acid poured around Hellbuster's legs and feet. His clothing seemed to melt from him. He looked aft at the skipper, and up at the second mate, glancing the while at his own acid-bitten flesh, while fumes and spirals of bitter reek enveloped him.

"Rope that man, Mister Bard, and haul him out before he's flayed alive!" the skipper shouted.

Men looked down from their safe perches in awe, while their shipmate burned up before their eyes. Hellbuster grinned through agonized lips, and hung on to the ends of the rope that the acid had eaten in two. With his body, he wedged off the space where the carboy had stood, and slowly the acid found its way through the scuppers, leaving a trail of darkening wood, spread over a wide space by the ship's rolling. The second mate made ready a bowline and was about to heave it over Hellbuster's shoulders, when he saw what was being accomplished.

"A couple of hands get into sea-boots and come with me!" he roared. "Get a move on, and we'll save the rest!" His own shoes burning, and his clothes smoking, Mr. Bard did not wait for the rubber-booted men, but leaped over the spars and cast his line over a bitt and ran it along the shaking line of carboys. The captain ran along the monkey bridge to direct. The mate came from below, called by the steward, to lend a hand. Not a man in the ship but knew that the spilling of all those fifty carboys of acid must mean disaster to the structure of the vessel. Even the one that had broken had put enough acid to work around the deck and bulwarks near the fore rigging to make it hazardous to overpress the ship with sail. Fifty carboys let loose must mean the destruction of

everything it touched. And the ship rolled as if her builders had imprisoned an imp within her only to be released when horrid death had a scoop in sight.

And they secured the remaining carboys. They carried Hellbuster out of the fiendish corner he was wedged in and took him aft, stripping the rags of clothes from his raw flesh, putting him in the spare berth. There the steward plastered him with rags soaked in linseed oil. There the captain sat through long hours, looking moodily at the unconscious Hellbuster.

To the spare berth the men came in twos, asking permission to see Hellbuster when he had regained consciousness. Tyrone and Ben Todd came together, strangely. Hellbuster was swathed from head to foot in oily cloths. There were bare patches in his straw hair; only one blue eye managed to look out, but that one held the ghost of the old twinkle.

"An' if you hadn't hung on, Hellbuster, all the acid 'ud ha' carried away, an' that 'ud mean the ship 'ud have to be short sailed home, becos the acid 'ud eat up all the iron—" Tyrone was going on with a long story, and Hellbuster's solitary eye was not twinkling much, when Ben Todd broke in:

"Stow the guff, Tyrone. He ain't fit to hear a song and dance. As it is, Hellbuster, the Old Man'll have to go easy on the canvas, because the port plates are soaked with acid beside the fore riggin'. But never mind, chum. More days, more dollars, and you don't have to worry. You got it soft now, a bloomin' cabin passenger. Got lots o' time to get your feet healed ready to dance at Paddy's Goose. Hundred and twenty days, this passage'll be now. Bli'me, don't she roll! This calm'll last a week!"

"Ay like ta rolling," mumbled Hellbuster, his one eye again twinkling.

One Soldadera

By MEIGS O. FROST

ANY one who has marched with a Mexican revolutionary column remembers the *soldaderas*, the women of the regiment. Some are the legal wives of the soldiers; some are not so meticulous. But each has her man.

They cook for their men. They wash clothes. They do the work of the camp while the men do the fighting. Some childless, some with young children or even babies at breast, they go where the column goes. Now and then one of them has risen to heights of heroism. Such was Bella de la Torra.

Two famous American soldiers of fortune owed their lives to her—Sam Dreben and Tracy Richardson. It was just before the opening of the battle of Rellano in the Orozco revolution of 1912 against President Francisco Madero.

Attached to the native forces assigned to fight under the two American machine-gunners was a native lieutenant known as Chino. He was part Mexican, part Chinese, part Indian and part Negro. And he was wholly dangerous. Envious of the authority given the two Americans by Orozco, he sulked constantly and, when he obeyed orders, did it slowly and unwillingly. No open clash had come as yet.

Then came preparations for the battle of Rellano. Two thousand rebels ambushed themselves along the base of the hills and on the banks of an old irrigation canal. Rellano is in the foothills of a big mountain range bordering the desert, where the railway passes through a deep cut. Dreben and Richardson placed their machine-guns at the foot of the hills at an elevation of about twenty feet above the level of the desert floor, giving them a good view of the terrain and a flat field of fire. Chino lost his temper at this. He argued profanely that the guns should be placed well up in the hills, a thousand yards back.

"Shut up and take your orders!" said Sam Dreben. "Richardson and I are in command of this detail."

Chino's answer was a snake-like dart of his hand to his pistol. Richardson, a deadly pistol shot, drew and fired from his hip and shot Chino's gun out of his hand. Chino walked off cursing and took part of the machine-gun crew with him.

"I'll get you both for this," was his parting threat. A crowd had seen the affair. Out of that crowd stepped Bella de le Torra. She was a hardened camp follower, wild, dissolute, the property of anybody in the army. She could ride and shoot like a man—and drink and curse more than any three of them.

"See here, Colonel Richardson," she said, "last night I heard Chino say that as soon as the fight started he's going to shoot you and Colonel Dreben in the back and then take charge of the machine-guns. We need you two in this revolution more than we need him. I'll take care of him."

She turned to the men around her.

"Who goes with Bella to attend to this Chino?" she asked.

Nearly fifty stepped forward. Off marched Bella with her company. They overtook Chino.

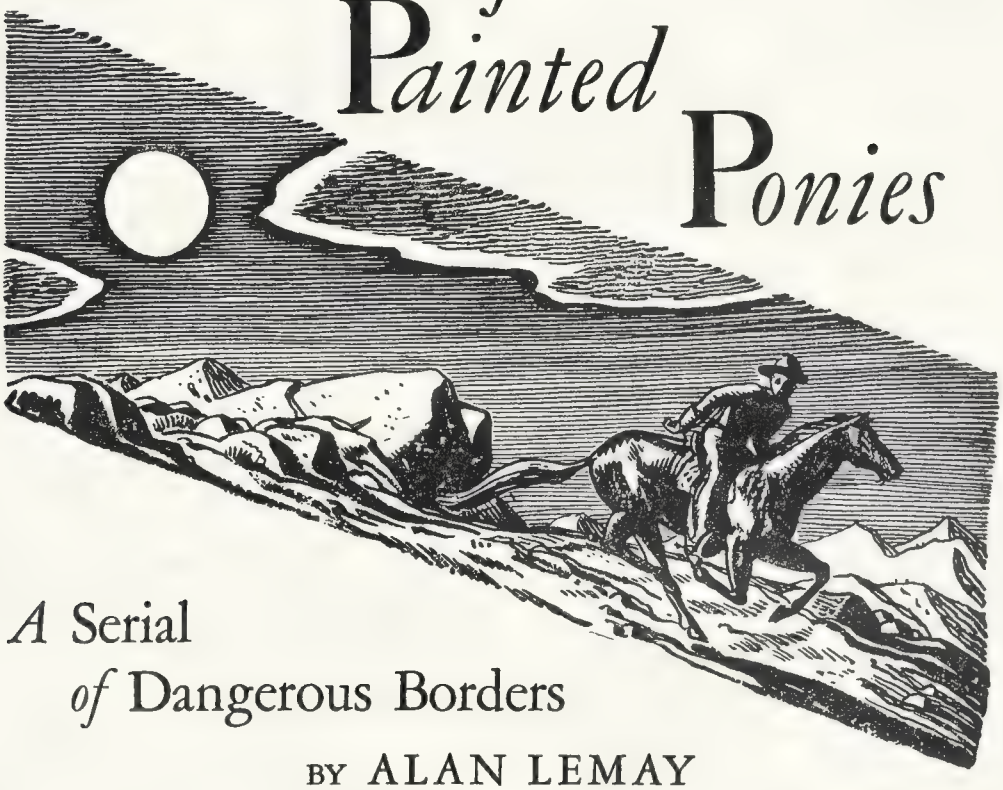
"Every one of us," she told Chino, "have sworn to shoot you the minute we see Colonel Dreben or Colonel Richardson fall."

They didn't fall. It was long after that Chino was shot, in quite another affair.

"But Bella de la Torra told me afterward," said Richardson, "that Chino told her that all through that battle he was praying to all the saints he knew that no Federal bullet would hit Sam or me. Fifty men pledged to kill him for Bella de la Torra was more than he wanted to tackle."

Presenting a new instalment

of Painted Ponies



A Serial *of* Dangerous Borders

BY ALAN LEMAY

WHEN "Slide" Morgan reined his tired horse into Roaring River on the Overland Trail to Salt Lake City he was broke but for a silver dollar. That night the roulette wheel replenished his fortunes to the tune of several thousands, but he incurred the enmity of Lew Cade whose brother, Abner, ruled the town.

Friends spirited him away that night, and next day he reached the ranch of the Texan, John Chase, who employed him as a rider. Slide hid four thousand dollars under the floor of his bunk that night. Nancy Chase, young and pretty, made Morgan wish to stay, but old John fired him after a week, under suspicion that he was a half-breed. When Slide returned a few nights later, with proof of his white blood, he saw Nancy in the arms of Lew Cade. In the fight which followed Slide mortally wounded the gambler.

Abner Cade took up the task of avenging his brother, and when Morgan, in flight, reached the town of Three Fingers, on the south fork of the Republican River, he found reward notices already posted.

ONCE more, wrenching his mind from the words of the strangers, there came to Morgan a keen sense of danger, this time so strong, so impelling in its tugging urge that it was no longer to be ignored. His ears strained and now it seemed to him that he could hear a faint, low, shuffling murmur, so vague that it might have been a breath of air upon an eyelash—or it might have been the sound of horses, far away. For only a moment it came to him, so weakly that he couldn't tell whether it was imagination or truth, then he heard it no more.

Very gently he set his empty glass upon the bar and laid a gold piece quietly beside it. The instant the gold piece was out of his fingers he forgot it; again his ears were searching the distance for that faint, almost indistinguishable murmur of hoofs. He could hear nothing. Perhaps if riders were indeed coming in, they had reined their horses to a walk, so that they made little sound upon the springy soil.

Thus, walking more softly than he realized, Morgan left the Three Fingers Bar and went into the night without waiting for change, and the eyes of five strangers and a barkeeper were impelled by that gold piece to follow him as he went.

REACHING the hitch-rack, Morgan instantly began to unsaddle the gray horse, his fingers working swiftly with the latigo strap. When both cinches hung clear Morgan dropped the pack of the black horse on to the hitch-rack, then he placed the saddle on the rack beside it.

He could hear those approaching hoofs again now, much closer than he would have believed, some trick of the dull, hot breeze had held those sounds away.

As he took the saddle and blanket from the gray a third indescribable warning came to him, subtly different from those he had received before. No voices now issued from the bar. Without raising his head he peered along the side of the low building which housed the saloon. Something had stirred there in the shadows. He studied those shadows from beneath the brim of his hat while his hands automatically shook the blanket free of folds.

He could see figures there now, the figures of at least three men. Two or more of them appeared as a mere black huddle against the outer wall of the saloon, but the third stood a little apart, a tall, bow-legged figure which stood as motionlessly alert as a listening fox.

An odd tensity, together with a peculiar cold calm, came over Morgan with this certain knowledge that he was watched. In the instant that his hands continued to shake the sodden blanket, he decided that these men were not yet certain; that they merely watched and waited for a sign.

Then the black horse pivoted, and for an instant the white saddle mark shone dully in the moonlight, full broadside to those erect watching figures in the shadow.

Morgan's hair rose, but he gave no sign. Quietly, efficiently, the speed of his hands gaged carefully to that of the approaching hoofs, he saddled the black horse. As a precaution, he untied the animal, keeping the rope end in his hand. Then he crossed behind the gray horse to its near side, took the reins from where they lay loose across the hitch-rail and deftly removed the bridle. It seemed to him that his progress was terribly slow, yet he dared not hurry lest a quick move assure those motionless strangers in the shadow that his was the ten-thousand-dollar head.

"Jest a minnit, stranger."

The words came in a mild drawl, gently brushing aside the silence of the night.

IT WAS the long-boned man with the out-curved legs who spoke. He had stepped out of the shadows as quietly as an appearing ghost. Across his arm lay the long, dull barrel of a heavy buffalo gun; behind him four other men moved quietly. The brilliant moonlight caught here the glint of an eye, there the exaggerated flash of a belt buckle. But for these shining things, the figures in the

moonlight might have been rudely molded from a greenish clay.

Morgan's left hand gripped the black mane of the gray just before the withers, with his other elbow he forced the horse to turn so that he no longer faced the hitch-rack.

"Yeah?" said Morgan.

"Jest come round from behind the horse for a minnit," said the mild voice apologetically. "We want to talk to yuh."

The tall man took a half-step closer, with a movement curiously like an old dog who inspects an unknown thing.

"All right," said Morgan agreeably.

The sound of approaching hoofs was closer now. If he had dared turn his head to the northward, he knew that he might have seen the approaching men and horses, dim through the moonlight. He shifted the black's lead rope into the hand that gripped the mane. His fingers found the quirt that dangled from his right wrist.

Then suddenly the quirt cracked upon the gray's rump. Morgan, gripping the animal's mane, bounded forward with the horse as the gray leaped ahead. The black's lead rope whistled through his hand taking with it the skin, but just before the end of the rope was reached the drag upon it ceased. The black followed, full stride.

On the second bound of the gray, Morgan's revolver was in his hand, on the third bound he fired over the back of his horse as he ran with a sort of galloping step by its side. Meantime the heavy buffalo gun roared with a mighty report, and death streaked over Morgan's head.

The revolvers began to speak now, their sharp, staccato barks following the roar of the heavy gun as wolves follow an elk. Lead whistled and whistled again but there were no hits in the uncertain light. On the fifth bound of the gray horse Morgan leaped astride, fairly swung into his seat by the haul of the gray's motion.

Riding low on the horse's neck, Morgan raked with his spurs. The lead rope of the black horse strained, and the pacer was forced into a hard gallop as they streaked for the open prairie.

Now a new element entered the situation. Morgan had counted on gaining a lead of at least a few rods while the men found their horses and mounted. Instead, a terrific smother of hoofs sounded closed behind him. Peering back over his shoulder through the silvery half-light, he could clearly see three hard-ridden horses. The approaching riders had swung into the chase without halt.

Already the three were beginning to string out. A horse of the dim color of the moonlight was well in the lead, much nearer than a hundred yards, and outdistancing the other two.

Now the guns began to speak again behind him. First one report, then another, then three that blended together like the breaking of a stranded rope. They crashed violently in the still night, insane voices of death. Morgan could hear the brief whirring whistle of the bullets over his head, simultaneously with the explosion of the guns.

There was a pause. Then a single gun banged, a trifle closer than before. Almost at the instant of the report a savage jolt shook the horse beneath him; the gray's breath left him in a great gasping snort, and his head went up, bared teeth to the sky, as his hind quarters stumbled and sank. The gray was down, hind legs crumpled, fore legs sprawled before him, pawing impotently as he desperately strove to rise.

Morgan had wound the lead rope of the black pacer around his left hand. The black leaped over him as the man was thrown almost under the galloping hoofs; then Morgan's arm was almost jerked from its socket as the horse hit the end of the rope. The hauling shock jerked the man bodily several yards and the black horse, his head snatched downward, tripped and somersaulted. The report of the gun and the sod-tearing thuds of the falling horses had sounded almost together; yet, as Morgan turned on his side, gun still in hand, the horse whose color was moonlight was almost upon him.

The fallen man fired two snap shots, as rapidly as his thumb could raise the hammer and the moonlight horse went down.

The black horse scrambled to his feet, and in the instant that the animal stood trembling with spraddled legs Morgan gained the horse's head. The black whirled away from him in a panic as he tried to mount, but somehow he grasped the horn with the same hand that held his gun and heaved into the saddle as the horse bolted.

An unrecognizable voice was crying out from where the moonlight horse had fallen, a voice twisted in agony, almost a scream.

"Oh, good God!" it yelled. "For Christ's sake help me! I'm pinned!"

Looking back over his shoulder, Morgan saw the two other riders pull up, and one of them spring to the ground. The other paused for only a few seconds, then came on; but in that brief space of time the bolted black had given Morgan a lead of many rods.

Now from between the three buildings of the town there came scurrying riders, first two, racing abreast; then another, and finally one more. The men from the Three Fingers bar were into it at last. Morgan replaced the three empty shells in his forty-five with cartridges from a pouch at his belt. A random shot or two came from the pursuers from the town from the extreme limit of pistol range, but the bullets were lost.

The single rider from the posse of three came on without firing, riding straight up and up, his outpointed elbows waving with the motion of his horse in the cowboy way. He was well within range, but he held his fire, striving to close the gap. Morgan fired no more.

Thus they fled south through the moonlight from Three Fingers on the Republican, and as the seconds lengthened into minutes the black horse began to gain. How far the other mount had traveled, Slide Morgan had no means of telling. He was certain now that the three men who had dashed through Three Fingers in pursuit of him were of the Roaring River posse—perhaps all of it, perhaps only a part. The man now riding hard behind him rode with the solid seat that he now knew characterized Abner Cade. Talky Peters had pointed the man out to him at a distance upon a day that they had lain in the sage and watched the hunters pass.

He believed, too, that he had recognized the stocky figure of Marve Conklin, the Roaring River constable, upon the moonlight-colored horse; the other man he did not know. He knew these men would be riding the best saddlers that money could procure, but if their horses were jaded by a hard day's travel the black had a racing chance. The pacer was worn lean from three weeks' travel, but he had been constantly bolstered with grain, and though he had a long day's journey behind him he was a fast horse still.

It was an even chance that the cowboys of Three Fingers would be upon horses of inferior worth. It was inconceivable that in this night's race there should be a fourth horse as good as the black pacer, the gray, and the streaking moonlight horse that he had shot down. Already his mind was reaching forward to his next expedients, as calmly as if the brother of the man he had killed were not but a scant hundred and fifty yards behind.

As he watched that other racing horse, dropping away ever so slowly behind him, he saw a sudden stab of flame from the gun of the man he believed to be Abner Cade. Four more shots followed in swift succession, then silence again, and the drumming of hoofs. Then, for a time the pursuit fell rapidly behind, the cowboys from Three Fingers closing up upon Cade's failing mount.

Now that the first phase of the chase was over, a swift urge came upon Morgan to spur the panting black horse to a heroic effort, in an attempt to lose the pursuit once and for all in the dimness of the moon-bathed prairie. But instead he began to steady the horse with the hackamore rope so that presently he brought the black out of the gallop into his long walloping pace. A hard pace will equal a dead run, sometimes, and every moment

that he could hold his own by pacing was in his favor.

There were cloud banks to the west, not solid banks, in great billowing blocks, but long wispy reefs obscuring the stars like dark smoke. If they should climb the sky and overtake the high moon he would have his chance of escape. Bunched together now, almost a quarter of a mile behind, rode three pursuers. Two more strung out beyond, perhaps nursing their horses along for the ultimate spurt, when his own black and the others should have tired.

And so they rode and rode over open prairie where low clumps of milkweed, tumble weed, and thistle varied the monotony of the buffalo grass; and though sometimes the pursuit was lost to sight among the long swells and sags of ground, those three clustered riders hung on, apparently always the same distance behind. The steady breeze of the pacer's motion cooled him, drying the perspiration that had dampened his shirt during the heat of the day, and an exhilaration came upon him. In his heart was but one regret, one sorrow—and that was for the game gray horse that lay far behind him on the plain, perhaps still struggling to rise from the prairie that his hoofs would never spurn again.

AT THE end of an hour's ride Morgan approached a river along which rose a long phalanx of willows, cottonwoods, and ash. And here he would have turned along the stream, in an effort to shake at least a part of his pursuers by means of the shielding trees, but because of the more treacherous footing he dared not. So he forded the nameless river and pressed on, taking such advantage as he could of the terrain to make his movements more obscure. And still the black horse paced, paced, and paced, lengthening his swaying gait at the touch of the spur but never breaking that long stride.

When the pursuit presently emerged from among the trees they were a little farther behind. At the distance an untrained eye would not have perceived them in the deceptive dimness of the light from the moon, but Morgan's eyes caught the faint blur of shadow, and the distant, minute suggestion of movement on the plain that told him they were there.

On they went, on and on and on, and still the pursuit clung; only two horses followed now, he thought, the third, fourth, and fifth having fallen away. Doubtless, he knew, the others would be in at the kill, if any. Though they had dropped out of his sight, they probably had retained sight of each other, and could thus compute his own movements as watching buzzards know the news by watching each other from miles away.

Another hour passed, and a third. Morgan could no longer tell whether behind him were two horses, or but one. It seemed certain that by now the following mounts would be badly worn; probably there was not a one among them who had not done a day's work before the setting of the sun. And though they had probably been under less prolonged a strain than the black, it was also likely that they were grass-fed horses, while the black was grounded in grain.

It was an even race yet. He knew that the pursuing horses must be galloping, and galloping hard. But the black pacer, blowing now, with the foam driving back over the rider's chaparejos in great blobs, was pacing still—and holding his own.

He was wearing down, that black; fresh from ten days' rest he would have been tireless, untouched. But the three weeks of steady travel had told. There had been plenty of grain but too little grass; plenty of water but not enough rest. There had been no time in this southward flight for the black to sustain the reserves that would have proved his true worth now. And at last, as the long hammering stride wore to a harsher, laboring pound, Morgan knew that the time for escape was short.

He waited until that dogging blur far back there in the moonlight had been hidden behind more than one long swell of ground; then swiftly he turned to the

left, and rode eastward, at right angles to the course of the pursuit. Now he touched with the spurs and the laboring horse strove to respond. He touched again, without effect, then three times more; and the black at last broke into a hard stretching gallop, strong-headed, game to the core. In that horse there was but one meaning in life and one religion; to run, run and run, until his long legs gave out under him and he dropped.

A low whistling moan came into the desperate breathing of the black; he stumbled on flat ground, caught himself, and drove on. The pursuit was not yet in sight. A half a mile, a mile at this terrific pace, and horse and man would be clear, having accomplished the change of direction without discovery in the blurring dimness of the moon.

"Black horse, black horse," prayed Morgan, "give me what you've got!"

The black horse was. Once more he faltered in his stride, stumbling as they descended the faintest suggestion of a dip; almost the horse fell. Then suddenly the rhythm of his gallop changed, and belly to the ground, spraddling madly, he bolted with a terrible burst of speed.

Instantly Morgan swung from the saddle, hands gripping the halter; and, half running, half hanging on the horse's neck, he dragged the brute to a stop. There was no alternative, he knew that there could be nothing good in this final burst of effort, but only a fatigue-crazed insanity. In a moment or two the horse would have gone down, perhaps never to get up.

Quickly Morgan untied the blanket roll that lay upon the saddle-bags, and flung it to the ground. The contingency now upon him was not one for which he had planned, yet now that the moment for a a new course of action had come he found that he knew what he must do. Kicking open the bed roll, he found a pair of moccasins which Talky Peters had given him on a day that now seemed as sunk in the distant past as if it were ages ago. He wrenched off his tight, high-heeled boots, a task that wasted many seconds, and put on the moccasins instead.

As an afterthought he tied one of the boots into the tail of the black horse, winding a wisp of hair about the spur. For a moment he considered taking his saddle from the horse, to carry it upon his own back. It hurt him to leave his saddle; he had ridden many horses, but his saddle was a part of him, always with him on them all. Never was such a saddle as the saddle that was his, but the beat of hoofs came to him and decided it.

Hurriedly he wrenched the saddle-bags, containing the last of his provisions, from the saddle. Then he clucked to the black horse, and cut the animal across the rump with his quirt. The horse sprang forward, paced a few strides, then broke into a hard gallop, the boot tied in his tail urging him on at every jump. Running hard the horse faded off into the dimness of the moon.

The beat of hoofs was closer now—too close. The clinging pursuit had perceived his change of direction, and by cutting across the angle had gained an eighth of a mile of ground. Morgan bent low to the ground and ran. He could see the rider plainly in the moonlight, coming at a laboring gallop. Morgan stumbled, plunged headlong into a patch of weed and sage, and lay still.

Moving cautiously, he drew his revolver from its holster, and twisted his body so as to be able to shoot. For a moment he thought that the rider would sweep past, following the running black. Then the rider sighted the blanket roll, far to one side, and turned his horse to make sure, perhaps, if it were not the fallen figure of a man. And as he did so, he appeared to catch sight of the movement in the sage as Morgan turned.

Morgan pressed the gun flat against the ground, covering it with his hand that the dark metal might not glint, and lay quiet. He saw the rider hesitate, draw his gun. The man's horse stood motionless, blowing, his head low, his legs spread. For a long, long moment man and horse stood

as if carved of rock, the man's eyes upon the dark blot in the sage but fifty strides away.

Both men, above the hard breathing of Cade's horse, could hear the receding hoof-beats of the galloping black. Then Cade swore, and fired once into the sage where Morgan lay; then wheeled his horse, spurred on, and was lost in the night. A twig of sage fell upon the back of Morgan's gloved hand; but for the present death had passed on.

Morgan immediately rose and walked southward, his moccasined feet quiet upon the grass.

FOR a long time he walked south, long after the hoof-beats had died away, until the moon itself had lowered, lowered, and sunk behind the broken rim of the west.

This after all was his element, his way of life, to be alone. The prairie was his prairie, the world that he understood. Except that he was horseless and afoot, he felt that he had never been more at home than he was this night upon a plain which he had never before trod. The prairie noises came to his ears as he walked.

The whispering movement of a bull snake in the slender-stemmed grass, the low, purring cry of a ground owl, the distant nickering, yapping cry of a coyote, far away.

In the dark hour before the dawn Morgan found himself in a slightly rougher country, broken by slight rolling hills, and cut by dry ravines. Finding a coulée to his liking, he built a tiny fire, such as Indians build, and cooked himself first bread, then salt pork, then coffee, all successively in the single utensil he carried—a frying-pan.

As he finished his cookery he put out the fire with scraped-up earth, and settled himself to eat sparingly, but in comfort.

As he ate, a new prairie voice came to his ears. From a high place perhaps a mile to the west sounded the long bass howl of a wolf. Twice the wolf howled, and paused, then howled twice more.

To the southeast, another mile from Morgan, a second wolf answered. And presently, far to the east, a third wolf howled once, so far away that Morgan could barely make out the dim brute voice, faint in the quiet of the night.

The first wolf barked three times, throaty, grunting barks, undoglike and deep, but with an odd power to carry a great distance over the rolling plain. The second answered, and finally the third from far away.

Morgan had paused in his munching to listen, but now he resumed, pondering on the language of the wolves, and wondering what it was they said. The voices continued at intervals, crying distantly to each other over the starlit plain, and soon Morgan began to wonder if he were sure of what it was he heard.

There was something unwolflike in the barks of the second wolf. Sometimes he suspected that it was no wolf's voice that he heard in the southeast, a mile or more away, but something else. The third wolf voice was too far away to judge by, but the first was strong and clear, and so thoroughly wolflike that when it sounded again Morgan laughed at himself for thinking any but true wolves were calling to each other on the plain.

For a long time the wolf songs sounded far to either side of his resting place in the dry coulée, calling and answering, answering and calling again, but at last they called no more, and a living peace lay upon the prairie.

Slide Morgan rested his head upon a saddle-bag, pulled his knees up under his chin and slept.

CHAPTER VII

LAUGHING COYOTE

HE WAS wakened by the sound of a shot, breaking his heavy sleep just before the light of dawn. For a moment he lay motionless, wide awake, but no more than half certain of the sound that had awakened him. Two more shots followed, the voices of rifles, the reports

coming too close together to be from one gun. They sounded far to the north. Presently they were followed by the distant sound of a galloping pony, to the northwest, and closer perhaps than the reports of the guns. Then all sound died.

Hurriedly he shouldered his precious saddle-bags and, after a hasty survey of the gray prairie, leaped from his coulée and ran southward. The light of morning was coming into the east, where hung long streamers of deep crimson, backed by an increasing glow of greenish gold. In the dusky west there still shone paling stars. There was not yet sufficient light for a man to see for any distance.

He ran in a muscle-bound trot, as riders run, taking but few precautions to avoid discovery in the shadowy dimness of first dawn. While he ran, his moccasined tread noiseless, he strained his every sense to detect a movement on the prairie but neither his eyes nor ears were able to learn anything more.

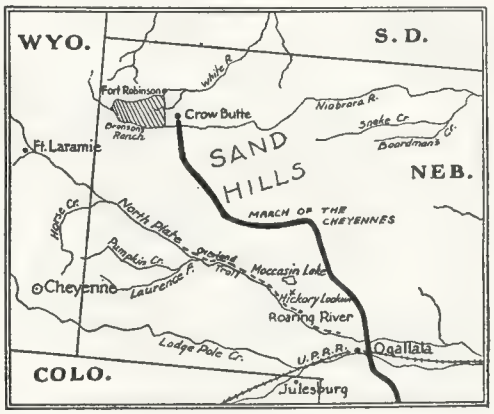
The light increased as his breath began to labor and he bent forward, to run more closely to the ground. The last stars died and the prairie went gray with the dawn, so that presently he dared run no more for fear of the unseen, unheard hunters behind. There was a long rolling rise ahead of him, clothed with weed and sage. He was about to make a final sprint to put the swell of ground behind him, when something gave him pause.

Far ahead and to the right, from some place that was hidden to him, had come the low, coughing bark of a wolf. It was short and soft-edged, almost drowned by his own breath and thudding heart, yet his high-strung senses left him in doubt as to what it was he had heard.

Ordinarily the sound would have brought him swift relief, assuring him that there were none waiting behind that long rise of ground and that once he had crossed it he would be alone. But now that odd premonition of danger was again upon him, a nameless warning too strong to be denied. Without reasoning, answering only the primitive urge of premonition, he dropped silently into the border of the sage.

The sage was scattering, but between its low, substantial clumps had risen silver-gray milkweed, thistle and the delicate thorny tangle of buffalo beans, so that there was ample cover for a crawling man. Through this low-ranged cover he wormed, slowly and carefully, toward the crest of the rise.

And now, in the increasing light, he discovered a single horseman far to the rear, rifle ready in his hands, coming on at a

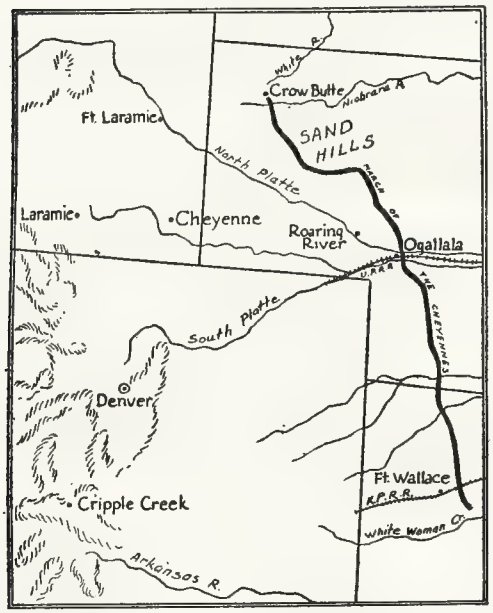


slow walk. The man was riding slightly to the west of south but as Morgan watched he saw the horse swerve uncertainly until its course was slightly to the east. So, then, they had learned that he was dismounted. The man was plainly searching the prairie for a hidden thing—and Morgan knew only too well what that thing was. The horseman's direction would make him pass near the man who lay waiting in the sage—if he passed at all.

Man and horse were lost behind an irregularity of ground. Hardly had they disappeared when Morgan sighted a second horse and rider a quarter of a mile westward, and somewhat behind the first. In a few moments a third rider appeared on a low hilltop far to the east, the horse and man stood for a moment in silhouette, tiny and black against the vast glow of

red and green-gold, then left the hilltop and disappeared.

How they had discovered his general whereabouts Morgan could only surmise. However that may have been, it was apparent that they were now combing the plain on which he lay. Since he had seen three horsemen, it was certain there must be more—five, six, seven, or many. It might well be that the advancing riders formed a segment of a circle which widened as they advanced, so that if the leaders missed him there would still be no



escape. Their uncanny accuracy in combing the one section of the limitless prairie on which he lay lent an air of fatalism to the movements of these persistent men; more and more Morgan felt that he was caught in the grip of events that had been planned ages before by unseen fates and now moved indomitably toward their close. Later he was to learn what it was that had led them there; but now the mystery of it added a deadly weight of sureness to the riders' far-flung approach.

Slowing, cautiously, that no weed-stem might signal to a far-off eye, Morgan crept to the top of the gradual rise and over it, until the swell of ground was between himself and the pursuit. A mile away—a long, long mile—he perceived a line of close-grouped trees that told him where a river ran. Could he have gained its banks there would have been such cover there as a man might use with, effect or, failing cover, he might have hidden in the yellow waters themselves, his face concealed by a drifting branch. The river meant escape, but he could never cross that mile of open ground alive.

Nearer, scarcely fifty long strides away, ran a twisting, dry, breast-deep coulée, its banks sometimes sharp-carved and overhanging, sometimes crumbling away. It was a natural rifle-trench, in low ground of course, but better to fire from, nevertheless, than weeds whose existence the bullets never acknowledged. It would make it harder for a surrounding party to snipe him from behind and although at this point the ridge gave the posse excellent cover, there must be other points along that coulée where conditions were nearly ideal for the defensive fighting of a cornered man.

He gathered himself to dash on hands and knees for the little ravine, yet somehow he could not bring himself to start. That nameless warning was breathing in his ears; it had increased as he topped the rise, placing upon him a caution far beyond that necessary for his end. He recalled the bark of the wolf, the natural signal of a safety which he could not bring himself to trust. He cursed himself for a fool, but even as he did so that intangible warning was telling him that within the ravine lay death.

Slide Morgan had followed hunches all his life without experiencing the deadlock of will which he now felt. He struggled to break it, but could not. And so, at last, Morgan slowly turned his body in the spot where he lay, until he could peer over the crest through the weeds at the approaching slow horsemen, nearer now, and laying his conspicuous hat aside, waited for the inevitable to come.

NOW that they were at grips at last, Morgan realized that he was glad.

The weeks of dodging, long days and nights spent in uncertainty as to the whereabouts of those who hunted him, had worn Slide Morgan more than he had known. The deadly malignance of this pursuit, expressed in the grim persistence with which they hung on, had bewildered the fugitive and shaken his confidence.

Long man hunts were little known in the parts of the West in which he had grown up. He had seen killings in plenty. He had seen men who had not met for years open fire upon each other at sight. At least once he had seen a quiet mob of forty or fifty angered men—the entire population of a community—swing into the saddle to ride headlong after an unfortunate whose dangling body they swore should decorate the nearest tall tree. But the pursuers dwindled upon the second day of the chase, and by the third night the last had turned back, satisfied that the culprit would travel far enough to trouble them no more.

But this chase was different. A small party—sometimes three, sometimes five—had followed him as best they could, losing the trail here, picking it up again there, but always following with the unswerving attention of wolves who have picked their meat. For them there was no halting to talk it over, no suggestion of turning aside or giving it up. They awaited no developments, but rode. Apparently they were always able to secure horses that were fresh.

But in addition to these armed men it seemed that certain couriers had ridden through the countries southwest, southeast and south. While he and Talky Peters had still traveled together, much time had been lost by them in doubling, hiding out, twisting, following devious schemes that were chiefly the product of Talky's free-roving mind. Thus the news of the Cade killing, together with information as to the heavy reward upon Morgan's head, had of late been ahead of him wherever he had gone.

At a lonely granger dugout, a woman had fired at him pointblank when he dismounted to ask for water. On the Colorado border a suspiciously kind-eyed man named Hughes had offered him employment as a gunman in a certain project that went undescribed and promptly set a party of three hard-looking customers upon his trail when he had declined. In Mack's Halt he overheard a rumor that Abner Cade had sold everything he had, and borrowed to the hilt, raising fifty thousand dollars to conduct the pursuit. He later learned that this was only partly true.

Not a man, nor a posse, nor a county, but a whole territory seemed to be raised against the careless cowboy called Morgan, now branded as a professional killer and a half-breed Cheyenne.

Not a little of the general animosity against him, Morgan realized, was the result of this lie as to his blood. Too many of the scattered men of the West had lost relatives, friends, or stock at the hands of Indian braves to leave an atom of sympathy for one believed to be of tribal blood. With so tremendous a reward upon his head, there were probably not three strangers in the country who would have hesitated to kill him for his scalp, as readily as they would have shot a coyote, or a snake.

Of late the black and yellow handbills advertising the reward had cropped up in nearly every settlement that he had been forced to visit. As much as possible he had avoided the habitations of men. But when in need of supplies he had several times ridden boldly into camps or rudimentary towns; and had found that the news of the hunt was always there before him.

He often wondered whether or not he would ever be able to lead a normal life in the midst of this monstrous fabric that had been woven against him, even should he escape and outlive the malignance of Abner Cade. He was loath to leave the country that he knew and loved. Yet recently he had been searching with increasing desperation for a clear path to

Mexico, California, or even the East. It seemed that his single misaimed blow in the dusk at Moccasin Lake had warped the course of his life past all recognition. Indeed, it threatened to cut off that life altogether; nothing seemed more likely to Morgan than that he should soon gasp out his life in some remote buffalo wallow, futilely fighting against too great odds.

Sometimes the mood that had been upon him the night of Lew Cade's death would return, and he would again hear the deadly, morbid refrain in the hoofbeats of his horse, "Murderer . . . Murderer . . ." At such a time it would seem to him that he was another man, different from other men, with a mark of death upon his soul that nothing could remove.

Oftener he thought of Nancy Chase, and the ranch on Moccasin Lake. As the days ran into weeks the memories remained poignant, undimmed. It was his hope that some day they would come no more.

But no man can long endure a battle in the dark, nor endless flight from an enemy unseen. Morgan liked the thought of death no better than other men. He had never been a fighter or an uncommonly reckless man; but the seeds of battle were in him, as they were in all men whose forebears walked light-hearted into the rigors of the West when the West was young. Better a fight, be the odds ever so great, than a perpetual horse-race that promised no conclusion.

Thus it was with a light heart that Slide Morgan watched the inevitable closing in of Abner Cade's men and, resting his chin on his arm, waited for what he knew might well be the end.

THE sun now lifted suddenly above the rim of the plain, its long rays dusting the crests of the swells with gold, and deepening the blue-gray shadows in the hollows that it could not yet touch. Then for a long time it seemed to rise no more, it was as if time had stopped, the world hanging poised in a cool bright light eternally young. How long Morgan lay watching the slow approach he did not know. It seemed to be for hours; it could not have been for long.

Sometimes the three wide-spread horsemen were visible at once. Sometimes one, or all, were concealed by the dips of ground that the shadows colored like standing pools. When they reappeared again they were closer; their eyes swept the plain. Thus a long time seemed to pass, until Morgan recognized the man in the center as Abner Cade.

He sat squarely in the saddle, this man, ruggedly erect and yet at rest; in his bearing there was a perpetual weariness, yet in his very passivity there was that suggestion of permanence that a man feels when he looks upon granite rock. The horse plodded with low-swung head, far more tired than the man; their movements made horse and man seem one, the figure in the saddle supplying the unfaltering purpose that made them both press on. And in spite of the swerving aimlessness of their groping course, horse and rider slowly neared the place where Morgan lay hidden in the sage. It was as if the very will of Abner Cade were guiding him unfailingly to the man on whose hands was his brother's blood.

Morgan studied him curiously in the cool morning light for, save at a distance, he had not yet seen this man who held all things less desirable than Benjamin Morgan's death. He could make out now that the man's face was square, massive, and grimly lined. The broad hat was jammed low over his eyes which Morgan could not yet make out; but he knew that they would be curiously light in color, looking shallow and hard, with surface lights. This then was the man who had ridden three hundred miles that they might meet, and would gladly, for the same purpose, ride three thousand more.

A fierce exultation came upon the waiting man, an emotion that was as far from fear as from wrath. His hands were trembling from the sheer strain of the suspense, but he knew that with the first shot every trace of this would be gone. He was eager for the smell of powder now;

only with great difficulty did he restrain himself from opening fire. But a part of his mind, at least, remained calculating and cool.

Closer; closer; Morgan would soon catch the glint of those light eyes. Closer; within a hundred yards now! The rider paused and studied the sage-clothed rise upon which Morgan lay. The waiting man sensed the movement of Cade's eyes as they reached the faintly bent stems of milkweed where Morgan had crawled; and an electric shock went through Morgan as the man became motionless, fixed. Then, suddenly man and horse moved directly toward him an ambling trot.

With fist resting on the ground Morgan aimed, slowly, carefully, and waited. When he saw those eyes, he would fire between them. When he saw those light eyes—

A spurt of dust leaped up a few feet in front of Cade's horse, and a bullet ricocheted with a moaning whine. Instantly there followed the report of a rifle from far to the left, where the coulée writhed northward beyond the end of the dying ridge. Looking westward, Morgan saw a tiny wisp of smoke drift upward from the gully's lip, and lose itself in the morning air.

Cade jerked his horse about so savagely that the tired animal became quiveringly alert. For a moment he stared while he located that faint wisp of pale smoke; then he spurred his horse punishingly, and rode at a dead run in a direction that would drive close by the point from which the shot had come.

Morgan was temporarily at a loss, amazed at the intervention of the unknown rifleman. Then a solution flashed through his brain.

"Talky Peters!"

Without pausing to think how Talky could have mysteriously arrived in the coulée, Morgan aimed at Cade and fired. Cade swung in his saddle, bringing his horse to a stop on its haunches. The bullet, Morgan judged, must have been close, by the effect of its whistling flight. Cade half-raised his rifle; apparently he could see nothing, and was waiting for a second gun-flash. Morgan waited.

Cade held his fire, attempting to steady his now excited horse. A rider from the east was closing in as fast as his horse could stretch, and Cade signaled to the man, pointing to where Morgan lay. Then he rode off to the assistance of the third rider, to the west, who was spurring hard toward the point from which the first shot had come.

Morgan turned his attention to the rider from the east, trusting Talky, or whoever his unknown rescuer was, to stand off the other two, until he himself could approach within pistol range. The rider from the east was coming headlong, and Morgan could not recognize him, if indeed he had ever seen him before.

Waiting until horse and man were well within range, Morgan fired. The horse went down, the man falling clear. Morgan fired again as the man dashed for the rifle he had dropped in the fall, but the shot took no effect. A moment later the man was behind his fallen horse. Deliberately the rifle began to speak. A bullet fled over Morgan's head, whispering "cousin" as it passed. A long pause—then another.

The man on the ridge could not retire, lest a movement of the weeds mark a target. Instead, he drew a careful bead upon the top of the man's hat, and waited. When the head lifted, he would fire. A new diversion caused him to turn his head. At the bend of the gulley from which the first shot had come, Cade had met the rider from the west. Apparently they had ridden boldly forward, for they were within a few yards of the couleé's edge. As Morgan's eyes found them he saw the unknown rider topple from his saddle. A tiny wisp of smoke, almost imperceptible, drifted up from a point in the coulée fully two hundred yards beyond. It seemed that the unseen gunner had shifted his position with an incredible speed. Morgan heard Cade's rifle speak, then he turned his eyes back to the man behind the fallen horse at the foot of his ridge.

He glimpsed the man's eyes over the barrel of the rifle, as he apparently waited for Morgan to move.

Instantly Morgan fired twice. A third report answered from below. Morgan's right arm jerked upward as if snatched by a rope, and the revolver fell from his hand.

Dazed, he examined his hand and arm. A jagged diagonal streak showed across his wrist, marked in sudden red. Down the palm of his dangling hand a swift rivulet raced; the blood began to trickle from the end of his little finger in quck drops.

The urge of desperation took Morgan as he overcame the dazed realization that he was hurt. That this was almost surely the end he did not stop to think; he knew only that he was hurt, unable to fire, and must swiftly take cover or die. Yet a single isolated portion of his mind remained cool, so cool that his left hand stabbed the pistol into his belt, and seized both his hat and his saddle-bags as he dragged himself backward, down-hill toward the coulée.

His maimed right hand was useless in crawling, so that as soon as he had placed the crest between himself and the enemy he struggled to his feet and ran. At the lip of the ravine he flung hat and saddle-bags in ahead of him, and gripped his flowing wrist with his left hand. In the next instant he stumbled headlong over the four-foot drop.

In the instant that he fell, something moved in the coulée. Morgan strove to check himself, but could not. He twisted blindly as he crashed upon the sandy bottom, wrenching the pistol from his belt with his left hand.

No more than three long strides away crouched a bronze-skinned figure on the flat floor of the coulée. One lean knee was drawn up under the bowed body, while one hand rested upon the ground and one upon the wall of the cut, in such a position as a cornered bear might take. Beneath the satiny red-brown skin of the naked shoulders the muscles lay knotted: over them fell strands of coarse hair, like the tail of a black horse. From a lean, dry-carved face, close-set eyes watched Morgan, narrow eyed, dark and deep, with surface lights. In the right hand, pressed against the coulée's wall, was a knife.

Morgan swiftly counted the shots he had fired; they were five, all that his gun had held. He dared not raise the pistol, lest that lean figure be upon him, but he held it ready against the ground in his left hand, an unspoken threat that lied. His eyes were drawn to the knife. Once it had been a butcher knife, to judge by the heavy wooden handle, but now the blade was worn incongruously thin, a narrow skewer like a rigid blade of marsh grass that Morgan in no way liked, He met the eyes of the Indian, and waited.

The man who confronted him was young, yet his face was drawn in hard lines that might have been an expression of suffering, of an intent purpose, or yet might have represented nothing more than the natural form of a face now in repose. The eyes told nothing, but watched unfalteringly, as an animal's eyes can watch.

Pain was now coming into Morgan's wounded wrist, white-hot, shattering: shuddering waves of it ran up his arm, sickening him. It played in his wrist with a throbbing beat, and down his limp right hand the blood ran unceasingly. He was supporting himself upon his left elbow, and now the muscles of his shoulder began to tremble. He felt that he was being bled white: his strength already seemed to be leaving him, and a mist of giddiness was rising in his brain.

Still the Indian made no move, but Morgan knew that only a miracle could extricate him now. There was no longer any doubt as to who had fired the shots that turned Abner Cade aside. He now understood the wolf-voices in the night, and the bark of the wolf in the coulée that had somehow warned him that no refuge for him lay there. Armed with an empty gun and one hand against an Indian with a knife, with other Indians in the coulée and, beyond, the rifles of

Abner Cade, Morgan took the only expedient that remained, and lowered himself into the hands of fate.

He took his finger from the trigger of the gun, and tossed the weapon to the feet of the Indian. Fumbling words of that half-remembered Indian tongue came into his mouth.

"I am of the Tsis-tsis-tas," he said in the dialect that Partridge Geer had unearthed in his mind, "a Cheyenne." He hardly knew what it was he had said, but he knew that it was conciliatory—if the Indian were friendly to the tribe he had named. "I can't shoot any more. Take my gun. Do what you can."

The young Indian did not reply. He leaned his shoulder against the wall of the coulée in an odd, slumping position that still remained alert, and picked up the gun. His eyes left Morgan for a moment as he expertly twirled the empty cylinders, then they swiftly returned, still expressionless and enigmatic.

Morgan fumbled at his cartridge pouch, and managed to fling half a dozen shells in the direction of the Indian. That steady trickle of blood was flowing unceasingly from the little finger of his right hand, not in drops now, but in a slender stream that swelled and lessened with the beating of his heart. The Indian's eyes flickered, and he reached for the cartridges.

The die was cast, now—either he was to live or he was not. Morgan relaxed his vigilance, and turned his attention to the wound, watching the Indian no more.

Swiftly he unknotted the handkerchief from his neck and tore it into strips with his left hand and his teeth. A narrow, string-like strip from the handkerchief's edge he knotted tightly about his forearm, just above the gory mass that had been his wrist; under this he inserted his pocket knife, and twisted the bandage into a tourniquet, until the strand bit deep into his lean flesh. Immediately the bleeding was reduced to slow-dripping drops, and his forearm began to puff.

His dangling right hand was limp, helpless, and bled to a deathly white; it seemed impossible to him that he should ever be able to use it again. Sagging against the steep wall of the coulée he slowly bound the wound as best he could with his other hand and his teeth, moving slowly, that his movements might be sure; for his muscles were responding uncertainly to his will, as a result of the shock of the wound.

This done, he again turned his eyes to the Indian. The man had not moved from his tracks, but now half sat, half sprawled, against the bank, as if he had allowed himself to sink where he crouched. His eyes were dull, and Morgan now saw that the Indian's lips were as livid as an Indian's lips may become. His left leg lay awkwardly; a tight bandage of some aged cloth was bound about the thigh, constricting it deeply. From bandage to ankle the leg was marked with black, faltering streaks of crusting blood. The moccasin was soaked with it, a dark, soggy red.

Morgan's six-gun was in the Indian's hand, replacing the slender knife which now lay drunkenly in its over-sized sheath, but he made no sign of using it.

Unsteadily Slide got to his feet and took advantage of a bit of brush to peer out of the coulée. At the crest of the rise, at the point where he had lain, he could make out through a rift in the brush the head and shoulders of the man who had wounded him. Morgan crouched back, and held out his hand toward the Indian, signing for the gun, but the Indian shook his head, cocking the hammer.

As Morgan again peered out of the coulée a bullet sung by his head and chunked into the bank behind him; two reports sounded almost as one, the second shot coming from well to the right. Almost at the same instant the man on the hill started violently, as with the shock of a sudden convulsion; he rolled upon his side, raising an arm as if in signal to friends far behind; then the arm fell limp, and he was still.

Slide Morgan sat down, nursing his hurt arm; and for a long time neither of the two in the coulée made a move. From

time to time the sound of shots came to them, sometimes startlingly near, sometimes from far away. At last the sound of a furiously galloping horse approached the crest of the rise, and for a moment paused. Again the rifle to the right spoke once, and they could hear the snort of the horse as he shifted his feet. But in the next moment they heard the horse galloping back in the direction from which he had come. From these sounds Morgan judged that Abner Cade or another had come for the man who had been shot, perhaps killed, upon the crest.

Time dragged by, and the sun rose higher, beating into the coulée. Morgan remembered the canteen which he still wore, and for once drank deeply. He flung the canteen to the Indian, who accepted it in silence, drank a few mouthfuls and tossed it back.

Presently, having drunk once more, he pulled his hat over his face and sank into an unwholesome sleep.

HE SLEPT neither long nor well; insane fever dreams haunted him, hallucinations shot through with pain. And while he slept the sun cooked him, drying his mouth and swelling his tongue.

When he awoke he would have talked to the Indian, who seemed not to have moved so much as a hair's breadth throughout the time that Morgan slept. But the half-remembered words that had come to his tongue in his moment of extreme need had again sunk into the deep shadows of memories all but lost. He pondered a long time, striving to enunciate words that always just eluded him.

At last he was able to form a sentence, a question the meaning of which was decided more by the words he had found than by what he wished to say.

"What are we waiting here for?" he asked in Cheyenne. His voice was so dry and croaking that he startled himself.

The Indian turned his eyes upon him and lifted an eyebrow questioningly; the broken dialect had evidently escaped his understanding. Morgan tried again, enunciating each syllable slowly.

The man grinned faintly, a grin that drew down the corners of his thin-lipped mouth, and shrugged his shoulders.

Speaking partly in signs and partly in straggling words that came to him out of the abyss of the past Morgan suggested that they go to the river a mile to the south, where there would be shade and water.

Slowly gathering himself for a tremendous effort the Indian heaved himself upright upon his sound leg, leaning against the bank with his hands, but the knee trembled and gave from under him, and he sank back awkwardly. He shook his head. Evidently he was weak from a very considerable loss of blood. For all Morgan knew the Indian had not eaten for several days. Certainly the man was a long way from where any Indians were supposed to be. It was plain that he was too weak to travel of his own strength. No doubt his move to spring upon Morgan when the latter had stumbled into the coulée had represented the final desperate effort of a wounded and cornered man.

"Where are the others?" Morgan asked.

"I don't know."

Morgan's arm was swollen into a shapeless club of pain; his right hand was numb and appeared shrunken; it was as stiff as if it were dead. He loosened the tourniquet and, although the bleeding began again, it appeared to be but a slow seepage, of which he held no fear. He could not move his fingers, and to touch them was to rack his whole arm with pain. New, dry pains played like heat lightning in his fingers as the blood began to return into the strangled member, but he did not replace the tourniquet.

Instead he increased the bandages on the wound with strips torn from his shirt, and beneath the highest of these he wedged a pebble at the place where the pulse could be felt. The pain remained, nagging, sinister, with no promise of surcease. A terrible feeling of helplessness

was upon him, the feeling of a wounded man denied by his kind. There was a lost sensation in the pit of his stomach as he reflected that wherever he turned for help there would be guns raised against him. Talky Peters still believed in him, he knew, and Jake Downey, but they were far away. There came to him now a realization of the cruelty of these animals called men. They were like starving wolves, turning upon the first of their kind to go down; excepting that these men were neither starving nor in need, but well-fed, complaisant, hunting him as they hunted the buffalo which they were killing by the thousand for their hides.

Every affront that he had ever suffered throughout his varied life returned to his memory now, piling evidence upon evidence that in the world he knew there was neither friendship nor mercy, but only the war of each man for himself. He remembered self-minded men with whom he had brawled in bars and hot-tempered foremen he had quit with anathema ringing in his ears long before the days when he had got his growth and made himself recognized as a top hand.

He recalled old John Chase, the kindness of whose eyes now reappeared to him as a leering fatuousness. Here was a white-bearded old man upon whom he had counted; yet Chase had been swift to turn against him at the word of a pallid-eyed gambler who lived by chance and the strength of his brother's name.

A great wrath swept into him, a deep and bitter hatred of the breed from which he came. For the first time he was glad that he had killed Lew Cade, glad that the blind blow in the twilight had found its mark. What injury Lew Cade had actually done him Morgan could not be sure, but in his present insanity of wrath and hate it was enough for him that Cade was of a piece with the rest.

Nor could he recall the people at the ranch on the Moccasin Lake without remembering Nancy Chase; even now his mind's picture of her stood as representing something visionary, something clean and fine, distantly apart from anything that his workaday world contained. Yet he had seen her in Lew Cade's arms, an incongruity so savage that it had brought the world crashing about his ears in a mist of red.

A terrible determination came upon him that he should not die in this place, defeated by the human rubbish that was striving to make the prairie their own. They would get him in the end, he knew, but when they did—Lew Cade would not be alone.

He dragged himself out of the coulée onto the flat of the prairie on the side toward the river to the south. Then he extended his hand downward for the Indian to grasp, and with Morgan's help the man drew himself up the bank.

"Give!" Morgan commanded, pointing to the gun.

The Indian hesitated, but the cowboy extended his hand with such a supreme aspect of assurance that the other obeyed. Morgan thrust the weapon into its holster.

He had forgotten his saddle-bags, containing all that he owned of any use. He went back for them, and gave them to the Indian to hold.

"What do they call you?" he asked haltingly.

"Laughing Coyote."

"Can you walk?"

The man called Laughing Coyote could make nothing of this question; but it was plain to Morgan that the answer must have been that he could not.

"Ride," said Morgan.

He stooped low, took the Indian's right wrist in his left hand, turned, and hoisted the Indian on to his back. Not so much as a gasp came from Laughing Coyote, but Morgan felt the Indian's naked muscles knot and shudder with pain.

Morgan's knees quivered with the effort and for a fleeting moment they sagged beneath him. In that moment something far greater than the petty accomplishment attempted hung in the balance. A year, a month, a day before Slide would have put the man down as too heavy for his remaining strength. But a

new power had come in to Morgan with his determination not to die in the hands of the Vigilantes in this place, a power greater than his own strength, as scornful of physical limitations as to pain.

He straightened his knees with a heaving jerk, and stepped off with a firm stride. Thus they crossed the long mile of rolling prairie to the banks of the nameless river, where the willows and the cottonwoods clung close to the life-giving water.

And here the Indian would have let himself down, and stopped, but Morgan went on, and crossed. He turned eastward where the hard ground took little mark from his moccasins, and at last halted well down stream, where a matted thicket of young willows offered an impenetrable cover.

There they lay upon their bellies at the margin of the little river, and drank and drank. Morgan sunk his wounded arm in the limpid water until only the bandages remained dry; and presently the throbbing pain was somewhat cooled.

Cooled, somewhat, too, was the hot anger and hate that had surged within him with his first full realization of what his outlawry meant, but as it cooled and the smoke cleared from his brain a new element, cold and hard, remained behind, a lasting thing.

CHAPTER VIII

A MAN'S HORSE

THEY dared not light a fire, these wounded men, so close to the place where they had last been seen, but they hungrily devoured the last of Morgan's raw salt meat and the fragmentary remains of the bread he had cooked between midnight and morning in the hours of the stars.

It was while he groped in the deepest corners of the saddle-bags for lost broken crumbs that Morgan found a crumpled scrap of paper. He flattened it upon his knee and studied out its hurriedly penciled scrawl.

DEER SLIDE,

I maid up my mind to maik yu taik Irn Hed, my Big blak paser. I did not tel yu what all yur up agenst I did not dast But it is plenty, yu wil need the best horse there is Any plais like as not. Iren Hed is that Horse. I looked twenty yeres for that horse and this is him. Never was such a Horse in the world befor. Save him all yu can, there aynt any mor like him wher he come from. Feed him good, saim as if he was me, only mor so, he has got me beet evry way. But if it comes to the pinch, kil him. I gess that is what he was foled for, mayby. Trust old Irn Hed. He will giv yu all he has got, and Brake his Big old hart under yu if yu say the word. —JAKE

P S that naim Iren Hed is jest a joke. Maybe part of him is Irn, but it aynt his Hed. He is the Best frend a man ever had. I am kind of sory I naimed him that now.

Morgan re-read the scribbled note three times. There came back to him the quiet cabin at Hickory Lookout, and once more he could hear the voice of Jake Downey insisting that he take the black pacer.

"—old plug—one that won't be missed — worthless — do to hobble along—"

Morgan now knew what a grinding grip of will it must have cost Jake thus to run down his beloved mount, branding the brave black worthless, of little account, that the horse might go to a running death.

Jake Downey was known to Slide as a man of frosty sarcasms, chary of praise. In the crumpled scrap of paper the man's very soul lay open. Morgan knew that he must have valued the horse above all things; all things, that is, save one—his love for his friend.

Against the ugly background of the men who were hunting him down, Jake Downey stood out in Morgan's mind as one alone, a single instance of loyalty and worth in a breed gone small. Slide had himself known what it was to love a horse, and knew that had it been feasible Jake Downey would far rather have rushed headlong into battle than to send that black pacer into the unknown from which he might never return.

Truly in Morgan's mind these horses that died in service were so far superior to the men they carried that the riders were shamed and belittled by the presence of their own mounts. Only Jake Downey stood apart from the rest, alone.

Not alone either; there was Talky Peters, the quiet man with the foolish ears, who had voluntarily cast his lot with Slide, outlawing himself to tote a gun for a chance friend. In the midst of adversity the friendship of these two men remained to Slide as the one good thing in which he could yet believe.

He slowly tore the fragment of paper to bits, and buried the pieces in the sand. His battered nerve almost cracked under the stress of this last emotion. He knew that the tears were close to his eyes, and as he fought against them he lowered his head, lest the Coyote see and judge him unfit to be called a man.

But when he raised his head again his face was as stoically hardened as the Indian's own.

CHAPTER IX

HUNTING DOG

"YOU'D better move along," said Laughing Coyote at last. "They'll be here pretty quick now."

The long day was gone, and the afterglow had faded away. In the west, in the dimness where the last red-gold light of the sunset had died hung a single great star of melted silver, seeming to throb and quiver like the high, liquid note of a bird.

Morgan did not understand what the Indian had said, and the Coyote repeated slowly with descriptive signs of his hands. When the cowboy had made it out, he listened attentively for the sounds of an approach, but heard nothing but the living things of plain and creek—the *peent* of a night-hawk, the quick slap of a fish, the faint, distant squeak of a rabbit whose leaping was at an end.

"Who? Where?"

"Tsis-tsis-tas," said Laughing Coyote. "Cheyennes. Hear them? Three—four horses, jogging along back there by that coulée."

Still Morgan could hear nothing—unless it were the faint, ghostly bark of a wolf, far off. He looked questioningly at the Coyote, and the Indian nodded. Morgan had already found that the Indian spoke no other language than Cheyenne. Their speech was a motley mixture of Cheyenne words, gestures, and flashes of the sign language with which Morgan was but little familiar.

"Get out of here," the Coyote insisted. "You helped me. Now I'm helping you—you're lucky to keep your gun and stuff."

"You —— dirty Injun," exclaimed Morgan in English, "I'd like to see yuh take 'em!" Then he returned to his fumbling Cheyenne dialect. "I haven't any place to go; I haven't any horse. I'll stay here. I'm your friend, I tell you, a brother to the Cheyenne people."

"They'll kill you," said the Coyote. "They'll kill you to shut your mouth!"

"The whites know about you by now," Morgan pointed out. Then, with a swift deduction, "They were following your horses when they found me."

"That's so," the Indian admitted. "But they were only following ponies in the dark. We may have been Pawnees, Kiowa, or who? But you know we are Cheyenne, and they'll think you'll tell. Me, I'll risk that. Now get out, while you can!"

"The whites have sent many men with guns to kill me," Morgan answered haltingly. "A thousand horses are offered for my scalp. I would rather be killed here than die walking on the prairie without a horse. I've tried to help you. But if your people wish I will fight them here." He paused, and decided to add a boast. "They call me Cheyenne, because I can fight like three."

Coyote considered.

"Half-breed?" he asked.

At this point Morgan would have denied that he had Indian blood but a strange doubt suddenly overwhelmed him. After all, he had little knowledge

of his ancestry save that his father had been a bull-whacker. At Roaring River they had taken him for Indian Frank, and he knew that now he was called Cheyenne Morgan. His cheek bones were high, his skin dark.

With his own world gone mad the epithet had lost its sting. Perhaps—who could tell?—these men had perceived in him something of which he himself was not aware, some fatal characteristic marking that had turned men against him as certain horses are made outcast by their kind. He considered a long time, and finally spoke the truth—

"I don't know."

The Indian studied him in silence; what was going on in his mind Morgan could not know.

"I've given you food," Morgan went on. "I've carried you to water. I'm willing to help you and your people, if you will help me."

Laughing Coyote said nothing, and for a long time they were silent. Presently Morgan heard again a faint wolf's bark, short and low. It was nearer now, and Morgan knew that unknown to him the Indian must have left some sign showing the direction in which he had gone.

This time the wounded Indian answered, a low carrying sound like the cough of a wolf, and another faint bark far out on the prairie to the north told them that his friends had heard.

THREE horses were coming toward them; two of them were ridden by dark figures, the third was led. The first horse was dark, bay or black; a shadowy moving shape against the moonlit prairie. The second horse was gray, harder to see than the dark horse, well adapted to the color of the night. At times he was almost invisible, except for a certain old-silver sheen on thighs and shoulders when the moon caught the muscle-rippled hide aright. Again with a dark background of sage, he stood out clear-cut, a ghostly figure. But the third horse was a true eye-cheater, of shifty, ill-defined outline, seeming to flicker deceptively and almost vanish as it moved in the uncertain light.

As the group came closer Morgan recognized the third horse as a pinto, colored in huge black and white blotches of indeterminate shape. In the dimness of the moonlight these garish, irregular colorings tricked the eye, making the familiar horse shape almost unrecognizable against whatever background it might be placed. Had the animal been motionless he would have looked less like a living thing than like a buffalo skull, a boulder, and a dark clump of sage; many an eye would have passed on.

With the riders there was approaching a crisis in Morgan's life. Laughing Coyote had said nothing more. What the intention of this wounded man might be Morgan could not even guess. If the two approaching Indians wished to kill him, it was very probable that they could, for Morgan's left hand was untrained with the gun, and hence would be slow and probably shaky. Yet he was prepared to fight if he must. There was still a forlorn chance—if there were no more Cheyennes on the way.

Even now while his hidden destiny approached—life or death, the end of all things or another chance to defeat his enemies—Morgan studied the peculiar semi-visibility of the pinto horse. It was a thing he had never noticed before; he had believed that any horse but a white horse was harder to see than a pinto. Perhaps, after all, there was reason behind the Indians' love of painted horses.

He would have liked to have stood up for greater facility in action, but he dared not, lest his conspicuous white man's garb have too swift an effect. So he crouched cross-legged, his belt twisted about so that the holster hung on the left. This brought the butt of his gun toward the front, an awkward thing, for him, but it was the best that he could do.

The horsemen hesitated as they drew near, searching the covert of the willows with their eyes.

"Here," said Laughing Coyote.

They turned and came directly to the

hidden men, the horses crushing down the swishing stems of the willow shoots with their big hoofs.

Then Laughing Coyote spoke rapidly in Cheyenne, using short sentences that yet seemed long; for in the Cheyenne tongue are many words made up of groups of smaller words, chained together into long polysyllables. Morgan could catch but little of what the Indian said, strain as he might to arrange the few words that he recognized into thought. The combination words tricked him, leading him astray with names of things that had a bearing on the thought only in conjunction with the words to which they were joined, so that Laughing Coyote seemed to be speaking in a disjointed code.

He could see the riders, he knew, far better than they could see him, even allowing for the superiority of the Indian eye. They and their browsing horses were half silhouetted against the star-set sky, half outlined in dim silver as the moonlight caught the glint of hair or the outline of shoulders. They lounged easily on their saddleless mounts, their weapons resting carelessly in their hands. One sat his pony with a certain lithe erectness, as if his body had no weight. The other rested in a side-slung slouch, supple, poised, beautifully at ease.

The latter suddenly spoke in a voice deep and hard, cutting through the utterances of the enfeebled Coyote. The perfectly understood words struck Morgan like a blow in the face.

"Kill him—we need his gun."

A weapon shifted slightly in the Indian's hands. Morgan recognized the deep breech and high-horned hammer of a Sharps Carbine.

The third Cheyenne, he who sat so lightly erect upon the horse that was gray, now quietly spoke a single word—

"Wait."

Laughing Coyote stirred, as if pulling himself together, then there burst from him a torrent of words, of which Morgan could make nothing.

Slide sought desperately for words of this dialect that only half eluded him, and spoke in a voice steady and strong.

"I have carried more bullets in my body than there are in your pouch," he lied, approximating his meaning as nearly as he could with such Cheyenne expressions as he could call forth. "It will be an honor to kill me. I'm ready!"

The two mounted Indians glanced at each other hesitantly, each turning to his comrade in search of decision that somehow was not there.

"He may be of our blood," said Laughing Coyote. "The Cheyenne who kills a Cheyenne rots away inside. Also remember Hunting Dog's whip."

There was a long silence on the part of the men; the jaws of the horses crunched steadily as the animals tore off twigs with their lips and teeth. The gray horse shifted a pace, stretching a long neck for better provender.

"This is a brave man, a good enemy," said the quiet voice of the gray horse rider with a hint of a chuckle.

"He could have killed you as you came up," declared Laughing Coyote. "He can kill you where you sit!"

The Indian with the carbine gave a neutral ejaculation that seemed to convey negation.

"This is a brave man," said the quiet voice again. "Give him a horse, and let him ride."

"He'll get no horse from us," said his companion shortly.

At this Slide Morgan silently moved his hand to the butt of his gun, for he had made up his mind that from this encounter he would either obtain a horse or accept now the death that must surely follow. It was a stealthy movement, made in the thickness of the shadows where no moonlight came. Yet the erect Indian on the gray horse perceived it and stiffened into an attitude peculiarly motionless and alert, like a listening bird, and his face did not again turn away from Morgan.

"Take him to Hunting Dog," said the Coyote.

"Will you go to Hunting Dog?" the deep voice asked.

Morgan considered hastily. Who Hunting Dog was he did not know; but he assumed that he must be the leader of these far-wandering Cheyennes.

"Yes," he said at last.

THERE were but two Indians at the place to which Morgan was taken. One of them was a young man, scarcely more than a stripling, with a long, passive face upon which rested an air of impermeable calm that was belied by the impetuosity of his movements. He lay sprawled by the compact fire, with the red light glinting on eyes and greased hair, and instantly scrambled to his feet upon perceiving that the returning scouts were not alone.

The other rose from a squatting position with a smooth movement, and stood waiting. It was this man whom the Cheyenne scouts addressed and Morgan perceived that he was Hunting Dog, to whom the scouts acknowledged a leader's authoritative rights.

As he studied this man who was to have so much to do with his immediate welfare, Morgan felt surprize that he, rather than one of the two who had brought him here, was the leader of the party. The man was far from prepossessing. His figure was wiry, but lightly muscled, promising neither notable strength nor unusual agility and it was mounted on legs remarkably bowed in a race in which bowed legs were the rule. His face was thin, with long, prominent nose and receding chin, and from beneath a forehead, broad but very low, peered small, beady eyes without expression.

Hunting Dog wore a breech clout, and a sleeveless jacket worked with porcupine quills in blue and red, nothing more. He stood watching the approach of the four men—Laughing Coyote sitting awkwardly upon a led horse—with an edged intensity. There was something sinister in his face when his eyes were upon Morgan, something suggestive of a veiled malignance. Yet his hands rested relaxed upon his hips, and he made no hostile move.

Certainly Hunting Dog did not look to Slide Morgan like a chief of scouts, nor a leader of men. Later he was to learn that the Cheyenne possessed certain qualities that his fellows did not. Hunting Dog was that rarest of Indians, the type that never rested but in sleep.

He knew no laxity, no assumption of safety, no carelessness in the detailed execution of a foregone plan. Lacking any particular skill in feats of horsemanship or battle, he was nevertheless of a limitless endurance, and in taking a trail or in perceiving a distant sign he was unsurpassed. Had he possessed breadth of intelligence, or any capability for original thought, he might have been such a chief as the Cheyennes have seldom known; as it was he was chief scout for Little Wolf, who was war chief for Dull Knife's Cheyennes.

"The Coyote is hurt," said the man who had ridden the gray horse.

As the firelight shone on the lithe, straight figure, Morgan observed that the young man's face was strong and handsome, after the Indian fashion; but the expression was light and mocking, appearing careless, almost trivial in contrast to the sober, poised intensity of Hunting Dog. This Indian was called Blanket.

With a sort of rough carefulness they lifted Laughing Coyote from his horse and laid him near the fire. Hunting Dog examined the wound, gently running a thumb along the skin by the torn flesh. Morgan could perceive in his manner a keen personal solicitude, for these scouts were his, young men placed in his charge, with whom he must accomplish certain things. Hunting Dog would have cursed when a needed horse went down; so much the more precious to him were these young warriors which he could in no way replace.

The leader of the scouts replaced the ragged bandage and stood up. Blanket's companion now strode forward, his step firm and quick. This was the Cheyenne of the deep, hard voice, who would have killed Morgan had he had his way; and indeed the whole spirit of the man was obviously different from that of any of

the others. His eyes were arrogant and direct, his nose high-bridged, his mouth prominent and firm. About him was neither the light mocking grace of Blanket nor the ever-watchful tenuosity of Hunting Dog. He was a fighter born and bred, of that stock which had given the Cheyennes their fighting name.

He went directly to a buffalo skull that lay to one side of the fire, facing it; and stooped to touch the skull perfunctorily between the horns. Then, directly and without interruption, he told Hunting Dog what he had done.

"We rode northward a piece," he said in his low-pitched voice. "We saw three or four big herds of range horses—most of them broken—and we picked up a few we liked the looks of. Then, as we started back, here came a bunch of cowboys. How they discovered us is a mystery to me. We tried to let them pass, but they almost rode over us; and that's where the Coyote got hit. Well, as soon as we could—"

As the man talked Morgan strained his mind to follow the tale he told; but although he could make out the thread of the story there was much more of it that he lost. Yet he was experiencing a peculiar sensation as he listened to the Cheyenne tongue, as one who visits a place he has known in his dreams. Bit by bit, in dawning vistas, there was coming back to him a language that he had once more than partly known.

Now a controversy of some sort broke out among the scouts; and many a rapid sentence came to Morgan's ears without reaching his mind. The fragments that he caught told him that they were discussing himself; and presently, when Laughing Coyote began to speak, Morgan understood the greater part of what was said.

"This man isn't a prisoner at all," the Coyote was saying. "He was fighting the same whites we were fighting. The Otter knows nothing about it."

The deep-voiced Indian seemed to resent the contradiction; but except for a grunt he did not dissent.

Blanket and Laughing Coyote began to argue some point concerning Morgan, but Hunting Dog cut in sharply.

"They saw you with the horse herd!" he accused the Otter.

"No, Dog."

"How could they come after you without seeing you?" Hunting Dog demanded furiously; and now the veins were starting out upon his forehead. "You are not fit to be scouts! You've shown yourselves, and given away the plans of Little Wolf! When the tribe—"

He paused, for the Otter had fiercely flung out an arm, and held it rigidly pointing at Morgan, while his eyes riveted those of his chief.

"This man understands Cheyenne," said he. "If we are going to speak plans of Little Wolf, let's kill this man first."

Hunting Dog hesitated for only a moment. Then he swayed forward with his face so twisted with the intensity of his fury that Morgan thought the man was about to spring; and the Otter himself gave back a step.

"I'm not going to be turned aside," said Hunting Dog in a voice quivering with rage. "I'm talking about you, and this thing you've done! It was given to you to find horses, to show the way for the rest. Instead, you've betrayed your people!"

It now appeared to Morgan that a misunderstanding had arisen over a circumstance that did not exist in actuality. Only he, of the men present at the tiny hidden fire, realized that the hard-riding posse had not galloped in pursuit of the true Cheyennes, but Morgan himself. He felt moved to enter the argument, and groped for words.

"The white riders chased me," he said. "They have turned against me because they say I am a Cheyenne. I have fought them, and they wished to kill me. I think they knew nothing of your scouts. They stumbled on to them by chance, and saw nothing."

"I think he's right," said Blanket. "When we fired, to save the Coyote, they looked surprized. Like men who

hunted one man, and found more than they counted on."

"All right," said Hunting Dog bitterly.

His mind had already wandered from the question, and was studying Morgan. For a long time the Indian's small eyes rested upon him, while no one spoke.

"Those are Cheyenne moccasins," said Hunting Dog at last. "He talks our language, but he talks it like a white man."

He paused, then spoke directly to Morgan.

"Are you of Cheyenne blood?" he demanded.

And Morgan answered as he had answered Laughing Coyote—

"I don't know."

The Otter made a sign, and Hunting Dog shook his head.

"He's helped the Coyote," he said, "and he claims to be our friend—" He shrugged.

Slide, wearily alert, felt that he was dealing here with beings utterly apart from his own understanding; men childlike in their reasonings, yet with the unaccountable, matter-of-fact savagery of predatory animals.

"We must have your gun," said Hunting Dog to Morgan.

At this Slide pretended not to understand, but Hunting Dog pointed to the weapon and extended his hand commandingly.

For a long moment Morgan hesitated, looking Hunting Dog in the eye. During this pause the Otter silently stepped away from the fire; and without moving his eyes Morgan knew that the Indian had gone behind him, and that the Sharps Carbine was ready in his hands.

If he were to give up his weapon he would be defenseless in the hands of these Cheyennes, who might well be expected to leave him afoot and without food upon the prairie—if they left him alive at all. Yet, if he refused, he might precipitate a fight which could mean nothing but his death.

There was also his predicament as an outlaw to consider. Horseless and weaponless he might still reach a settlement; but what manner of reception would he find there? Behind, in the background, there was forever hovering the sinister, implacable figure of Abner Cade, whose life now had but a single aim.

His wounded arm was paining him savagely. A hot torturing grip, as of iron fingers, was grinding into his forearm above the wounded wrist, and the entire arm throbbed as if in harmony with the measured beat of a drum. His head was beginning to swim; he was faint and dizzy from exertion, nervous strain, and loss of blood.

They were awaiting his decision. Hunting Dog's hand was still outstretched in demand. He knew that he must speak. Once more Slide Morgan pulled himself together, and let himself drop into the blind abyss of his fate.

"Do you ask this as a gift from your friend?" Morgan inquired steadily.

At first Hunting Dog did not understand what Morgan had tried to say, but presently the keen-minded Blanket caught Morgan's meaning, and smilingly explained it to his chief. And Hunting Dog, looking Morgan straight in the eye, answered—

"Yes."

All eyes watched Morgan fixedly as he unhooked his outer gun belt, and passed it to the waiting Indian.

Then Morgan sat down cross-legged by the fire and closed his eyes, for the fight had gone out of him and his life was irrevocably in hands not his own.

CHAPTER X

SHADOW WAGONS

THERE was meat in plenty, though nothing else. The huddled heap of fire was broken and spread out flat, a bed of pulsing coals. Over this the beef was broiled. The youth with the long face—Morgan had now learned that his name was Feather—soon passed out great slabs of hot meat, first to Hunting Dog, then to the Otter and Laughing

Coyote, and finally to Morgan. The Indians ate ravenously, tearing at the meat with hands and teeth, cutting off with their knives mouthfuls into which their teeth had sunk.

Gorged to repletion, Morgan presently drank deeply from his canteen, and succumbed to his fatigue. The pain in his arm was less now. It had settled down to a dull, pounding throb, naggingly incessant, but endurable. He stretched out full length on the ground; his thoughts blurred, and presently the firelight and the Indian figures dimmed away.

It seemed to Slide that he did not entirely sleep, for he knew where he was, and those who were with him; yet a strangely familiar dream after a time overlaid his blurred consciousness of actual things, like a thin mat of loose grass thrown upon the surface of a pond.

While still at the fire of the Cheyenne scouts it seemed to him that he was also in another place. Other figures were seated, knees hunched before them about another, brighter fire. Beyond the figures, shining yellow in the light of the flame, he could see the great, tube-like wagon covers of prairie schooners, as familiar to him, it seemed, as the light of the distant stars, and the glow of fire in the night, things forever integral with the life he had led.

A man sat cross-legged, half-facing him, so close that their knees sometimes touched. The knees of the other were huge and bony, and the man himself towered over Slide Morgan, for Morgan was a tiny boy.

The man was talking to him, telling him a story in a low voice; and, oddly, he was speaking not as others spoke but in the language of the Tsis-tsis-tas, the Cheyennes. And Slide Morgan understood perfectly everything that this man said. Gone were the misty, smokelike veils that had befogged his memory, more than half-concealing the forgotten dialect when he tried to talk to Hunting Dog and the Coyote. He was living again in the past, and the things that he had once known he knew again.

It was some story of war that the man told, about a man named Elk Beyond The Hill. Queerly, the story was new to the little boy, yet the man who lay beside the cooking fire of the Cheyenne scouts knew that he had heard it before, perhaps many times. As the short syllables of the dialect rolled off the tongue of the story-teller the odd, brief words were as clear in meaning to him as the real talk that everybody else used, and that he himself always used except when talking to this man.

The story ended.

"But what became of the pony?" asked the little boy that was Morgan.

The man pretended that he did not understand; Morgan knew that he understood perfectly, but this was the game that they always played. The boy laughed, and asked the question in the Indian language as the man wished.

"Why," said the bony-kneed man, "the pony went home to the hills where he used to live. He ate grass there, and buffalo beans. In winter his ribs stuck out. In summer he was fat."

That was all of the story. The boy's eyes wandered sleepily around the circle, over the few other men about the fire. They were bearded men; they wore broad hats, some black, some gray, and high heavy boots, but not chaparejos. He had seldom seen chaps then.

Then he looked beyond, to the great covered wagons in the shadows, and beyond these, between their tall wheels, to where the prairie lay dim in the starlight, dark, full of mystery. Out there some small, shadowy thing moved carefully and quickly; he saw two tiny green lights out there in the night, close-set glowing lamps that were eyes. He watched them with wonder and pleasure for a long time, for then the world was new.

Presently as he watched they slowly began to fade, and all things dimmed with them. People were moving near, close to him, yet they were not the people of the prairie schooners, but others of a later, nearer time; they moved through the figures of the bearded, booted men as

if both peoples were ghosts. A pain, like the slow beat of a death drum, was throbbing in his arm again.

The man that was Morgan realized that something he desperately wished to know was on the point of escaping him. He wrenched his gaze from the fading green-eye lamps on the prairie and sought the face of the man who sat cross-legged, speaking the language of the Cheyennes. The face eluded him; it seemed dimly veiled in smoke. Then the smoke cleared and Morgan looked for a moment through the eyes of the boy he once had been, into the face of an old friend whom he could no longer name.

Eagerly he studied the firm, lean face, in which wind and sun were just beginning to set their marks. He saw that the man's eyes were direct and dark, his nose prominent, his jaw smooth and strong. He alone of the men of the prairie wagon was clean-shaven. As Morgan looked into this face in the firelight he felt that he had seen it since, that he knew this man's name. Desperately he sought the answer while his eyes slowly dimmed and the firelight darkened. Almost he had the answer to many things. He strove harder to hold the vision of that slowly vanishing face, to solve the identity of this man of another day. He almost had it! Almost—almost—another moment—

Some one shook his shoulder roughly, wrenching him suddenly out of the ghost world of the past into the harsh realities of the present. The face, the bearded men, the covered wagons vanished into the dead years from which they had come. Morgan lifted his head and looked hastily about him. There was a flush of sudden anger upon him at his awakening, and the feeling that some revelation of great value had been lost to him by the breadth of a grass blade, but the dream of half-remembered things was over.

BLANKET was standing over him, smiling his mocking smile; it was he who had awakened Morgan. The fire had lost its light, and lay a broken bed of scattered, winking coals. As his eyes sought it there was a hiss of water-struck embers, and even the place where the fire had been went black.

Horses were moving close at hand, and he could hear the low voices of the scouts. As his eyes became accustomed to the starlight he saw that a pony stood where Laughing Coyote had lain. He could make out the rigged travois, consisting of two long poles that trailed behind, with which the pony was burdened. Dark figures of men were lifting something—a body or a man—on to the travois just back of the pony's stifles; reason told him that they were thus placing the Coyote for greater comfort in travel, but so still was the wounded Cheyenne in his comrade's arms that for a moment Morgan had a swift impression that the Indian was dead.

"We are going now," said Blanket. "Stay close. Make no noise. It will be bad for you if Hunting Dog becomes angry, or even the Otter. Here is your horse."

He pressed a halter shank of common lariat whale line into Slide's unwounded left hand, and turned away.

"Can it be that these bucks are countin' on me, a'ready?" Morgan asked himself. "A real live *horse?*"

But as he examined his new mount in the moonlight he saw that Blanket's caution to him had been purely charitable. The pony was an aged one, of a color between a dirty white and a speckly gray. He was sharp hipped and low of head, and his poor old legs were battered out of shape by the rigors of time and the plain. Any horse that a Cheyenne scout would deign to ride would overtake this pitiable old plug in two strides. Probably a runner on foot could catch him. Slide knew that only Laughing Coyote's plight would enable him to keep up on such a mount.

He rose, slung on his canteen, and threw his precious saddlebags across the back of the old pony. Then he led the pony to the side of Laughing Coyote's travois, and waited. They were moving off now,

south by east, away from the river by which they had camped. First rode Hunting Dog on the painted horse that was so hard to see, with him rode Feather, a few lengths to his rear. They moved off at a fast walk, their good ponies stepping high, and tossing their heads against their hackamores.

When the two were almost out of sight a scout called Standing Alone, whom Morgan had not seen before, mounted a round-bodied bay mare, and struck off to the southwest, on a diagonal to the path of Hunting Dog. And a moment later Blanket, after a last word with the Otter, took a similar course to the southeast. The four who led were now spread out fanwise, moving gradually farther apart on the plain. For a time Morgan could make them out in the light of the low moon, but presently the bay horse was but a drifting shadow a long way off, and the receding gray had merged into nothingness and the misty light.

The pony who bore the travois pawed uneasily, and as each rider moved off he would have followed. But the Otter held him with one light hand upon the bridle until at last he too moved off in the path of Hunting Dog, and the travois pony followed his mount. Morgan now mounted with the greatest of difficulty, and permitted his aged pony to fall in behind the travois.

They walked their horses for a long time, and although Morgan could no longer glimpse the horses of the other scouts, the Otter seemed perfectly assured of where they were. Once in a great while a signal drifted to them from ahead or far to the side—a single coyote-like yip, or the faint distant chuckle of a ground owl. Sometimes the Otter answered in kind, but more often not; and the wounded cowboy on the speckly old pony was usually in doubt as to whether men or animals had called out in the night.

The saddle-bags modified the bony ridge of the pony's back, and the gentle rocking motion of the walk lulled Morgan into sleepiness. He dozed—

CHAPTER XI

THE PRAIRIE

FOR Morgan days passed lazily. There was always enough to eat. The scouts were burning no gunpowder, but their short, powerful bows and sheet-iron-tipped arrows were more effective than many a white hunter's rifle. When rabbits and small birds were scarce there was beef, for they were not yet into the vast Indian territory to the south and the herds, while scattering, were never hard to find.

Sometimes Hunting Dog traveled boldly by daylight, apparently without caution. At other times he lay close by day in the coverts of river thickets, and traveled cautiously after night was well advanced. But always they were on the move, their directions constantly shifting. The marches they made were long, with few rests, in three days' time the party covered an incredible amount of ground. Once in a while they passed settlements, and these Hunting Dog circled carelessly, although by night.

Occasionally Morgan saw cowboys in the distance, and twice, moving wagon trains. More often the Cheyennes sought cover when Morgan could perceive no cause.

Morgan's position in Hunting Dog's party was a curious one. He was half a prisoner, a man who knew enough about their movements so that they feared to let him go; and half a refugee, whom the Indians tolerated because he was wounded and in danger from his own kind.

Continually he pondered over the eccentric movements of these far-traveling Indians, so far from the place in which they were supposed to be. It was plain that these were no loose-wandering bucks, intent only on living their lives beyond the restraint of the United States Indian agencies. It seemed apparent that these men were at work upon some definite mission. Yet the Cheyennes to the southward were at peace, to all accounts. Perhaps, Morgan conjectured, they did not intend to remain so long.

The days had builded into a week—two weeks—three. A scout named Standing

Alone disappeared, and a day later another Indian, on a horse so utterly ridden out that it was at once abandoned, took his place. The newcomer was a man with a flat face, and powerful shoulders that contrasted remarkably with his knobbly, stick-like legs. He was called Strong Neck.

Slide's wounded wrist troubled him less and less. For many days the throbbing ache persisted, but the bleeding stopped, and there was no infection. In another week even the ache had ceased, and as long as he kept the hand quiet he suffered no more pain. The fingers, however, continued to stiffen, and no longer responded to his will. The little finger he could move but slightly, the rest not at all.

With his chaps off and his shirt in ribbons, Morgan began to look a good deal like his companions. His neckerchief was gone, and his black hair was growing long over a neck that was almost as bronzed as those of the Cheyennes. Both Strong Neck and Hunting Dog wore hats much like Morgan's, and Feather wore the rim of one; and Blanket's shirt was vastly superior to Slide's. His moccasins were the same as those of the scouts.

Only his beard marked him as of another race; and not always his beard, for Morgan shaved with more regularity than ever before, on the hazard that his Indian resemblance might prove useful. The Cheyenne language, of which only two or three hundred words were in common use by the Indians themselves, he soon had well in hand once more, so that he had little difficulty in understanding the Cheyennes or in making himself understood.

For all practical purposes Slide Morgan had gone red.

CHAPTER XII

TALKY PETERS' RETURN

IT WAS Saturday night, and pay-day. Only two riders remained to Jake Downey at Hickory Lookout, now that Talky Peters had gone to ride the long trails with Slide Morgan, and these two had ridden for Roaring River to change their slender wages into "ten thousand or nothin'!" at the Happy Chance.

So Jake Downey was alone, in the sultry shanty at the outpost camp of Seth Russell's Box R. He could have gone with the boys, had he wanted to, or rather, if he had decided to—for Jake did want to go, and badly. But a certain stiffness was coming into Jake's wiry frame, noticeable in early mornings. He was a long way from being old yet, but the rigors of a rider's life were beginning to make themselves felt and Jake, unlike most, was beginning to turn his eyes ahead.

At present he was forcing himself to spend every other pay-day at the camp. Later he expected to go to town only every third pay-day, and finally only twice a year. Even when he went to town, Jake drank but sparingly, avoiding circumstances in which he would need to buy drinks for more than a few men at one time. The spinning bowl and the poker tables he let strictly alone. These things saved money and Jake's scanty savings, invested cautiously in hand-picked calves, were slowly beginning to grow. Downey was an unusual man.

He knew that if he had learned his lesson but a few years sooner he would have been a cattle king before he died. As it was he stood moodily washing his own dishes in the hot cabin at Hickory Lookout, and pondered on better things.

After the frying-pan was scoured he would sit outside and smoke off the mosquitoes for a while, then he would go to bed. No, he thought, maybe he wouldn't go to bed, after all. Maybe he would saddle up and ride over to Moccasin Lake to see old John Chase, there was that matter of hay to talk about. Also there was Nancy Chase. Nancy was not for Jake Downey, and well he knew it. Still—

It was dusky in the little cabin; the long-lived twilight of midsummer left plenty of light outside, but within, with only a single half-permeable window and the

open door to admit light, it was almost too dark to see. Busy with the tinware and his thoughts, Downey failed to distinguish between the hoofs of the horses in the corral and those of the two that approached. Nor did he hear the step of a man outside upon the bare sandy soil. But when a figure blocked the doorway, reducing the dim infusion of light, he looked up quickly.

Talky Peters stood there, taller, leaner than ever, and looking vaguely older.

The frying-pan went on to the stove with a bang.

"Well, fer ca-a-at's sake!" Jake exclaimed. "A brand from the burnin'—or somethin'!"

He seized the slender cowboy by bony shoulders and shook him gleefully.

Talky grinned.

"Whatcha got to eat?" were his first words.

The outpost foreman instantly opened the drafts of the stove and chucked in a sparing handful of wood.

"Where's Slide Morgan?"

"Well—" Talky Peters paused, and took off his floppy hat to scratch his head reflectively. "Jake, I shore wish I knew."

Downey stopped dead still in his tracks, knife in one hand and a great chunk of beef in the other. He stared hard into the sober, quizzical eyes of Talky Peters, but read nothing.

"He ain't kiboshed, is he?" he demanded at last.

"Nope. Not that I heard. I wouldn't put it past him, though. Such a nonkeerful, reckless feller I never see. Slide sure is the right name for him. I don't believe he gives a whoop where he slides."

Jake put fat into the frying-pan on the stove, and sliced beef.

"How long since yuh seen him?"

"Oh—goin' on a month, now, Jake."

"Well, ge-reat jumpin' Jehosaphat, Talky!" declared Downey, banging the half-empty coffee pot onto the stove. "Will yuh tell a man somethin', or not?"

"Well—" Talky began, and appeared to ponder.

There the conversation held suspended while Talky unstrapped his chaps from his belt, removed them, and slowly worked off his boots. His thin, leather-brown face looked baffled.

"We rode over to Nick LaFarge's, like we set out to. Only we stopped over the next night, to let the horses get lookin' better, an' rubbed 'em some. Well, we got there all right.

" 'Well,' I says to Nick, 'Well Nick, Abner Cade cer'nly is on the shoot, some.' So Nick cussed Abner a little, and didn't ask any questions, and he treated us like two brothers.

"But, come to find out, there was another feller stoppin' at Nick LaFarge's, and I didn't like his looks none either. So when I found out he was goin' to Roarin' River, I says to him, 'Guess we'll ride south tomorrow.' An' after the feller had left in the mornin', that's what we done."

"Why didn't yuh say yuh was goin' to ride north, then?"

"Why, I figgered Ab would see through that, an' know we'd went opposite to what we said."

"Yeah," scoffed Jake. "Pretty deep, you are. That's jest what Abner prob'ly figgered you'd figger. You must think he's pretty thick. Prob'ly he got one step ahead o' yuh, right there."

"I guess so," Talky admitted wearily. "Anyway, it run along four-five days, an' here they come."

He poured himself a cup of coffee, blew on it, and tasted it warily.

"Well, then we rode some. It run along, two-three weeks—"

Then they rode some! Days of hard riding on jaded mounts; days without food, days without water; weeks in the saddle, with guns always loose and ready in their holsters; nights of forced travel, nights without sleep, sleep without rest; a hundred hardships, three running fights, as many desperate rides with riflery behind—all these Talky Peters dismissed with five words— "Well, then we rode some." That covered it as far as Talky was concerned.

"Which way?" Jake asked.

"All different ways. Mostly circlin' an' cuttin' back. Well, they finally come on us as we lay up in the Chicawaukee hills. Ever'body was helpin' 'em, looks like. We should 'a' made a straight run out of it in the first place; Slide had money for fresh horses, an' we could 'a' beat the news. But Slide didn't want to. Always thought it would blow over; couldn't tell him different. This Cade is the luckiest at follerin' anybody I ever see. I never see such a feller. He's twice worser'n the bleedhounds in Uncle Tom's Shanty. You shore are a rotten cook. This steer is bad hurt, but still alive an' strugglin'. You out o' wood?"

"Speakin' o' the Chicawaukee hills—?" Jake insisted.

"Well, when it come to the shoot we kind o' separated. We figgered to mebbe discomfuddle 'em, by shootin' in on 'em from both sides as they come up.

"Well, that held 'em off some, an' it was gettin' dark; they rode circle on us, but come dark we busted through an' got loose. Only we busted through in two different directions. Well, next day they sashayed me good an' plenty, after I thought I was plumb clear. Course, I could 'a' shot it out with 'em; but I was on'y tryin' to help Slide out, I wasn't mad at myself or nothin'. So I didn't. An' bimeby they quit me, an' I ain't seen 'em since. Nor Slide neither, look for him high or low."

There was a long silence, while Talky hungrily crammed down food.

"So I come back here," he concluded at last.

"So I seen," Jake commented. Presently he asked, "Where's Ironhead?"

"Well, Ironhead, he was with Slide, last I seen. An'—an'—he was goin' strong, too. Soon as Slide found Ironhead could spraddle out good he saved him up. He rode the gray mostly. There's a tough horse—that gray. Slide had to buy me new horses to keep up. Course he bought 'em oats wherever he could.

"They cer'nly held up great. 'Specially Ironhead. In a pinch Slide would change off o' the gray an' ride Ironhead bareback. They was a sight. I never see such a fancy horse. He'd step out with them big pacin' strides faster'n a plain horse could gallop, almost."

"This trip sure must 'a' been a revelation to you," Jake commented. "Pretty near everythin' you see was somethin' yuh never see the like of before."

There was more silence. Jake Downey ran a thoughtful hand over his square, muscular face, then sat fingering his cleft chin while Peters ate. He noticed that Talky's wide-open, confident blue eyes were a shade soberer than before his ride, yet his thin face on the whole seemed less mournful.

"Averagin' up," Jake thought to himself.

"Talky," he suddenly demanded aloud, "what did Slide ever tell yuh about how he come to kill Lew Cade?"

"Well—" Talky crammed his mouth, but struggled on—" 'bout the same as he told the both of us together. Seems he rode up to Old John Chase's place. An' there was Lew Cade. Seems Slide was plumb astonished to see him there, somehow. Well, one thing led to another, an' pretty quick—"

"I know; but what one thing led to another?"

"I'm tellin' yuh ex-zactly what Slide said."

"They got arguin'?"

"Nope, that's the funny thing. They didn't say nothin' to each other, nothin' at all."

"Then where did the row come in?"

"I tell yuh, Slide jest said one thing led to another. I guess yuh wasn't listenin' the first two times I told yuh."

"Oh, all right. Then what?"

"Pretty quick Lew throws down on him, and begins squirtin' hot lead all over Slide's clo'es. That made Slide pretty mad, and what with them pushin' back'ards and for'urds, an' it bein' dark, an' him feelin' hasty, he hauls off an'—"

"Slide never told you no such pack o' rubbish!"

"Well, mebbe," Talky admitted, reaching for the coffee, "them weren't his exzact words. But they was right along them lines. An' if you can make head or tail of the way he tells it you're a good one. Sometimes I think he never done it at all. Because to do it he would have to've been there, and no man that had been there would come away knowin' so cussed little about it."

"He knows more'n he's tellin', mister."

"You'll ketch up with me yet," Talky returned.

"I'm way ahead of yuh," Jake affirmed. "What I want to know is, which o' them two is Nancy mournin' over—Lew or Slide?"

Talky stared at him over his tin cup, his eyes questioning in blank surprize.

"Women don't hone after fellers that shoves corpses right into the house with 'em," said Talky at last.

"Can't always figger it so easy," Jake demurred. "They don't keep askin' about a feller that's plumb poison to'em, neither. Mebbe they might ask once, to see had he got his yet. But not three an' four times."

"She askin' about Slide?"

" 'Most every time I go there," Jake answered. "After the first time I on purpose didn't bring the question up, jest to see. An' sure enough, she always asked did I know what become of him."

"Might not mean nothin'," Talky offered. "When a killin' happens 'long side o' me, I like to know how it comes out, too."

"Then when it got around that Slide was a breed, an' they begun callin' him Cheyenne Morgan, I told her there wasn't nothin' to it, he was white. An' she allowed she thought he was to begin with."

"That's somethin'," Talky admitted.

The conversation lapsed, but presently Jake Downey offered a final idea on the subject.

"If you see her, I'd jest take a chance, an' not tell her how close pushed Slide is. Because it jest may be the wind *is* blowin' that way. An' she looks plenty down in the mouth now. Real peaked, I'd say."

"Shore."

There was a long pause, while Talky finished his meal.

Then, as the slim cowboy lowered his cup for the last time, he became suddenly motionless.

"Listen!" he commanded sharply as Jake moved to clear the table.

Jake listened, but his senses were less keenly trained by recent strain than those of the slender cowboy, and for the moment he made out nothing.

"Two riders comin' in," said Talky, "along the Roarin' River trail."

And in a moment or two Jake also could hear the jumbled patter of trotting hoofs. Perhaps Jake himself felt it odd that riders should be coming to his out-of-the-way cabin on a Saturday night that was also a pay-day, perhaps he only drew a certain sense of evil omen from Talky Peters' whipped and jaded nerves. However it may have been, both sat motionless, the man with the ruddy, muscular face and the man with the yellow stubble on his leanly angled jaw. And as they listened they stared into each others eyes unseeing, more like hypnotized men than like cowboys listening to the familiar sound of approaching hoofs.

In a moment the older man came out of it, and laughed.

"It's only a couple o' the boys, Talky. You look like you seen a ghost of somethin'!"

"What do they want here? It's pay-day, Jake.

"How should I know? Nothin' much prob'ly, an' what of it?"

"Jake—" Peters' voice was harsh and unfamiliar—"if it's me they want they got to shoot it out!"

"Nobody wants yore hide, Talky."

"Me an' Slide is of one piece, Jake, far's the Vigilantes are concerned. An' there's a pile o' money on that waddie's head!"

"But—"

Talky suddenly came to his feet.

"Gimme my gun!"

The gun belt was on a bunk, where Talky had laid it off with his chaps. With a movement at once quiet and

smoothly swift Jake Downey reached out and gripped Talky's wrist.

"Wait, Talky! You're a sight too nervous to be throwin' guns round!"

Talky suddenly stood ominously still.

"You look out!" he warned in a grating snarl.

Through the thick dust that now shrouded all within the cabin Downey grinned into Talky's face.

"Now you be sensible. Rest easy. I'll put on that smoke sling myself."

He picked up the gun belt with his free hand, then dropped Peters' wrist and buckled the belt about his waist. He slung it loosely, the heavily weighted holster dragging low.

Talky's pleading words burst forth in a strained whisper, for now the hoof beats were very close. "Fer God's sake, Jake! Yuh want me buckin' guns with a chair?"

"Well, I can shoot all right myself, can't I?"

The calm of the older man won the brief clash of wills, and Talky Peters sank back into his chair. Once more they sat listening, Jake absently studying some trivial object that he turned over and over between his hands, Talky waiting with the stoic resignation of the unarmed.

As the horses approached they could hear one of them drop from the trot into a shambling walk; it was close at hand, so close that they could hear its slowly blowing breath. They heard the other horse pass close behind the cabin, directly to the watering trough by the corral. And they knew that this horse must have been easily ridden, for it was being let to drink.

The walking horse, moving slowly and more slowly, plodded up to the very door. There was a brief pause; then a deep "whoof" of outblown breath, and a great low-swung black head moved into the doorway itself. For a moment both men sat paralyzed by what they saw.

"Good God! It's Ironhead!" Jake Downey burst out.

"It sure is!" confirmed Talky Peters in a daze.

Jake Downey sprang to his feet to go to the horse; then he checked himself and sank back upon the edge of his chair, his face troubled.

Suddenly Talky Peters' hand flashed across the table through the thickness of the dusk and gripped Downey's arm.

"Jake! Slide Morgan's out there!"

"Sh! Shut up!" said Jake in a fierce whisper. "I ain't so sure."

For several more long moments they waited in silence, listening, their bodies tense.

The horse disappeared. Then a tall figure stepped into the doorway, black against the fading sky; a figure with shoulders of a weary droop, that yet gave the impression of permanence that granite bears.

It was Abner Cade.

THE man hunched his head forward to peer uncertainly into the cabin, now quite dark, striving to accustom his eyes to the gloom.

"I'm here, Ab," said Jake.

The heavy figure did not relax, nor did the man give any sign such as an ordinary man might give at the assuring words.

"Jake," said Abner Cade—and his voice more than ever seemed weighted down with rock—"I've brought yore horse back. I turned him loose just outside. I picked him up quite a ways south."

"Thanks," Jake said.

"I come here to ask you a question," said Cade. "Was that horse stole?"

There was an electric silence, a silence that seemed charged with thunderbolts that lay in wait. Then Jake Downey spoke swiftly:

"That's my business, Ab!"

There was another pause; and when Cade spoke his voice was infinitely weary, yet infinitely hard.

"I ain't goin' to kill you, Jake—not here."

"No," said Jake, his own voice as hard and cold as frozen ground, "you ain't."

"But next time we meet up," said Cade, the bitter anger surging into his voice in spite of him, "draw an' fire! Because

I'm goin' to throw you in yore tracks!"

"Good!" said Jake.

Abner Cade moved as if to turn away; but at the last instant he seemed to become aware of the third man's presence, as if for the first time. By the position of his body, dark against the sky, they could see that he was again peering into the dark.

"Who's that there?" he demanded.

A casual answer might have turned him away; but now the blood was mounting to the former express rider's head.

"You leave hyar!" he commanded.

Cade's big body snapped tense.

"That's Peters," he said, his voice malignant.

As Talky Peters drew in his breath to speak, Jake Downey silenced him with a heavy boot in the shin.

"Well," he demanded, rising swiftly to his feet, "what if it is?"

"That man goes with me," said Cade.

Jake marveled at the cold, hard guts of this man who stood against two, yet disdained to move his body from the doorway's silhouetting light.

"He does like ——!" said Downey.

His right arm hung straight and limp at his side, the hand relaxed, but close to the butt of the heavy gun. He noticed that Cade's arm, too, hung close to his side.

"I'm head of the Vigilantes," said Cade. "An' the Vigilantes are the only law we got. When I say he goes, he goes!"

"Law?" spat Downey. "Law says you? Law that threatens to shoot a man on sight on a personal grudge! Think you're the law, do yuh? Well then I'm a couple o' bylaws an' a resolution!"

"He's gotta go with me!" said Cade again.

"Take him!" Jake Downey jerked out furiously. "I'll call that hand as it lays! Draw, —— yuh! Draw, if yuh ain't afeared!"

Cade made no move, and for a long time they stood thus, while no one spoke any more. The tin clock on the shelf drudged on through its task of counting off the seconds of interminable time, wearily clipping them away, one by one, "*Click-tack—click-tack—click-tack—*"

And at last Cade lifted his right hand from his side and rested it heavily against the door jamb beside the brim of his Stetson hat.

Downey laughed harshly.

"Don't want any, huh?"

"Mebbe I spoke hasty," Cade admitted; but in his voice was no trace of fear nor conciliation, only weariness and the weight of ballasting rocks. "I ain't ready to shoot it out with the two of yuh—not yet."

"No?"

"But I tell yuh this," Cade went on, "if the man that killed Lew was dead, an' I knowed it, there'd be powder smoke driftin' out o' this doorway right now!"

"Mebbe he is dead," Jake taunted him, for the battle drums were beating hard in the veins upon his forehead, and his hand yearned for the feel of a kicking gun.

"He's goin' to be," said Abner Cade, "if I live."

With that he turned from the doorway and disappeared. They heard his measured, heavy step receding toward the corral. After him Downey sent a single mocking bird—

"If!"

"THE trouble is," Jake Downey said after a long time, as he trimmed the wick of the lantern they had lit, "he's got so cussed many folks back of him."

"That's what comes with pilin' up a lot o' jack," said Talky bitterly, "then always hornin' in with somethin' to say."

"An' sayin' it square an' backin' it up," Jake Downey added. "You got to allow him that, Talky."

They were silent and thoughtful for a while.

"Slide shore picked the wrong feller," said Talky at last. "The wrong feller fer all concerned."

"I don't know as he did," replied Jake wearily. "Things had to come to a pass some time, Talky. It's just a question is Abner Cade goin' to run this range. I

don't like one feller runnin' things. Unless," he added with a faint grin, "that feller is on my side o' the crick."

"What yuh goin' to do?"

"What *you* goin' to do?"

"Jake," said Talky Peters with resolution, "it's come time fer you an' me to pull out o' this place. There's plenty o' room in this country fer a feller to work along, fightin' jest one feller at a time to keep things smooth. No call fer any one or two men to shoot it out with two er three whole outfits, jest to make a place where he'll be let to live."

"No?" Jake drawled.

"We got room in this country, Jake—lots of it. Places wuth lookin' into, too. F'rinstance, take the Powder River country. I ain't been there, but—"

"You been listenin' to Slide Morgan," Jake adjudged. "He ain't been there either."

"I was jest sayin' f'rinstance. Pick yore own place."

"All right," said Jake, "I will. I pick right here!"

"Jake, there's no sense in bein' bullheaded! I ain't afeared o' no man, an' well you know it. But—"

"Talky," said Jake Downey, "I ain't stuck on this place, 'specially. But I come here o' my own free will, an' I picked this place to stop. I got a few calves an' yearlin's runnin' on this range under my own brand. They ain't much, but they cost me hard work, an' I ain't goin' to be run off of 'em by no man, not if he's a whole army hisself. Because I ain't built that way.

"I'd like to move on. Tired o' here. I think yore Powder River is full o' Injuns, an' I bet stock can't climb it hardly anywhere. But I'm willin' to give it a go, or any other old place. But this thing has got to be scrapped out first.

"Aw, what's the diff, Jake? No sense in—"

"It's jest the way I'm built, Talky," he said with finality, and they fell silent. Presently Jake spoke again.

"I guess you better move along, though, Talky. You an' me can get together some other place, some time, an' we'll try out Slide's old Powder River."

"Who move along? Me?"

"Sure. They'll be comin' after yuh tomorrow or next day."

But Talky had changed his tune.

"Me hyper out of it, with a bother comin' on? I should say not!"

A twinkle came into Downey's eyes.

"Now, Talky, there ain't no sense in bein' bullheaded!"

"Hmph," said Talky, digging his gun-cleaning materials out of a pocket of his chaps. "Leave 'em all come. I hope this here range boils up solid. I hope it splits itself wide open! Let 'er buck!"

"Whatcha aim to do?"

"Clean my gun. Let's see it once."

Jake passed it over.

"Mebbe we can get around this shootin'," he offered.

"How? An' what for?"

"Talky, a little while ago I was jest prayin' fer Ab to draw; I'd 'a' put daylight through him quicker'n a wink, but that wouldn't 'a' settled nothin'. I been thinkin' up another plan. Yuh know, no man is as bad beat as when he's beat at his own game. Come mornin' we'll ride over an' talk to Seth Russell."

"I don't hold with no plans that leaves Ab Cade with a come-back," objected Talky. "Fer one thing, Slide Morgan ain't worth the sox he stands in until Abner is six foot under."

"He'll get there," Jake assured him. "But first I want him busted, so's he'll cash in his checks as a private cowman, an' not leave a whole darned hornets' nest stirred up behind him fer us to settle with!"

"How?"

"Don't know, Talky. Wait'll we see Seth Russell. We got to see what cards we got before we do any figgerin'."

He fell silent. Then presently his thought turned suddenly to Ironhead, and he hurried out. Alone in the hot lantern light in which a myriad of moths and insects swirled, Talky Peters continued the careful cleaning of his gun.

TO BE CONTINUED

How Much Do Coyotes Know?

BY

BARRY SCOBEE

A PRONGHORN buck antelope and a coyote were doing a sort of one-sided battle, with the antelope pushing the affair.

It was at sunrise of a May morning, in the Davis Mountains of Southwest Texas. I watched the conflict through a pair of glasses. The coyote had come down from the hills to the great grassy basin where the antelope grazed to find a baby pronghorn for breakfast, probably.

The buck kept at a gallop, rearing and striking with his fore-hoofs at the wolf. The coyote was bent upon avoiding the blows—and in this he appeared to be successful—and in getting past the buck back to where no doubt a doe and her young lay concealed in the grass. But the coyote could not get past the guard, had to keep on the jump to avoid the lightning-like hoofs.

Then the wolf tried one of his tricks. He ran ahead a hundred yards and sat down, hoping no doubt that the antelope would stop and go about his private affairs. The antelope, however, had made it his morning's job to get the wolf out of the basin, apparently, and he kept on, almost leisurely yet determinedly.

The conflict presently became more sanguinary, the antelope pushing the attack harder and harder. The wolf was barely managing to evade the striking forelegs. He tried running but could get no where at that, since the pronghorn is perhaps the fleetest animal in North America. The coyote was overtaken immediately and forced to dodge this way and that.

Up to this time the fight, if such it could be called, had no doubt been an ordinary one of animal-land, but now a new element appeared to enter—the "modern education" that some say the coyote has acquired in the struggle to survive in spite of the closing circle of civilization that has bested the buffalo, the beaver, to a great extent the bigger wolf, and the sock-eye salmon of Puget Sound and Frazer River waters.

The coyote, it seemed, began to use all his effort to make headway in the direction of a distant wire fence. The coyote tribe, or some of it, has evidently learned that when chased by a cow with a young calf they can escape trouble by going to the other side of a wire fence. This wolf appeared to be about to utilize that acquired knowledge. It was regrettable that the picture of the conflict began to dim in the glasses because of distance and the watching had to be given up. But because of an incident that occurred a few days later it seems probable that the wolf actually was making for the protection of the wire—likely not having learned that the antelope will go over or under such a barrier with scarcely any slackening of speed.

An old-time ranchman of my acquaintance, who will refrain from telling a story rather than give a wrong impression with it, told me that once he was chasing a coyote with a horse—not an uncommon diversion in the cattle country—and that when the animal realized that it was hard-pressed it set its course straight for a "tank," or little artificial pond, a mile away.

Arrived at the tank, the coyote plunged in to escape. Plainly he had had this ruse in mind from the first. The horseman rode after him and seized him by the scruff of the neck to hold him under and drown him—it was war to the merciless end on wolves in those days. The coyote seized the stirrup with his teeth to hold himself from being pressed under. The rider spurred out a step or two farther and the beast was under the surface. When the horseman turned his horse dripping from the water the coyote still gripped the stirrup, though its life was gone. The whole point of course being that the coyote knew enough to try to escape in water.

But here is the prize incident that happened a few days after I witnessed the conflict between the pronghorn and the wolf.

Late in the afternoon a cowboy and guide of hunting parties was riding in a fast roadster car with two other men when they saw a coyote in the same level basin where I had seen the chase. They entered the pasture and gave pursuit.

A race ensued wherein the car was often on the point of running the animal down. The wolf escaped the wheels time and again by quick dodging. The men did not notice what the speedometer showed in mileage, but when they had gone what they estimated to be four or five miles, turning this way and that with the coyote badly fagged, another coyote suddenly appeared and tried to draw the car off, exactly as a mother quail tries to draw off an intruder from her nest or young.

The men tried to refuse to be drawn off, but the fresh coyote would place itself so hazardously close to the wheels that sometimes the driver was tempted and was drawn off just enough to give the weary animal that was almost done for a chance to get a breath.

The upshot was that the first thing the men knew they were smack against a wire fence with the coyotes trotting off on the other side, their red tongues hanging out, a suggestion of triumphant taunting in the way they glanced back.

It was the same fence toward which the coyote had made when pursued by the antelope. The two coyotes chased by the car had persistently made for it too. This seems to point very definitely to the wisdom of the little wolf.

And no one who heard of this incident had ever before heard of one coyote going to the relief of another that was hard-pressed by man, though such relief, I understand, is not unknown when coyotes fight among themselves.

So just how smart is a coyote?

And here is

HAROLD LAMB'S

Latest Novelette

CHAPTER I

Only two men ride into the desert—he who seeks and he who flees. —Arab Proverb.

NUREDDIN was hungry. He squatted beside his donkey and watched a copper bowl simmering in the fire. Only a handful of barley was in the bowl and, although Nureddin had spent the twilight hour gathering fuel, the scanty heap of dry dung and tamarisk twigs would not make the water boil.

The hour of the *namaz gar*, the evening prayer, had passed, and the sun had dipped out of sight behind the rampart of mountains, a changing radiance clinging to a single lofty snow summit. Now this peak was gray and there stole over the caravanserai in which Nureddin squatted the utter quiet of the desert plain.

The donkey munched twigs sleepily; the sick man who lay in a corner of the broken stone wall moaned at intervals. He was an old man, come from somewhere or other, intent on reaching the thrice holy city of Meshed where he could die with the assurance that he had become a *hadji*, a pilgrim with the pilgrimage performed. Nureddin had inspected the thin body of the old Persian and did not think he would reach Meshed.

They had arrived at the caravanserai at the same time, coming from opposite directions, Nureddin whacking the rump of his donkey, and the pilgrim moving very slowly, sitting down often to rest. Few men passed by this caravanserai that lay on the edge of the salt desert, below the foothills of the western mountains. Here there was a well, brackish water that tasted of sulphur. No grass grew about the well, not even a withered poplar. Tough, gray tamarisk clung to the stones of the wall, and that was all.

Above this fringe of brush two heads

"*The Sea of the Ravens*," *copyright*, 1927, *by Harold Lamb.*

THE *Sea of the Ravens* *of the* Mongol Hordes

appeared, enormous in the dusk. After a look inside the heads materialized into two Turkomans wearing clumsy *kalpaks* of black wool and mounted on miserable ponies as shaggy as the *kalpaks*.

After inspecting the sick man the riders came and peered at Nureddin, who tried not to seem afraid of them.

"God be with ye!" he cried and received no answer.

One of the Turkomans, who wore two yataghans girdled high under his arms dismounted and kicked Nureddin's pack. It flapped open loosely, disgorging nothing of greater worth than a cloak with holes in it, a length of carpet, some scrolls of paper and a brass pen.

The tribesmen—who had wandered into the *serai* on the chance of finding odds and ends of plunder—scrutinized Nureddin's bald-faced donkey in disgust, sniffed at the copper bowl, spat into it and went off to the well.

Nureddin sighed thankfully. He was an astrologer and a man of peace; moreover he had various bracelets worth more than a little under his sleeves, and a purse slung beneath his arm-pit.

Since no further attention was paid him, he began to talk, and his tongue soon wagged freely. He called the Turkomans khans and *orluks*—eagles from the mountains.

"*Ai*, what a journey! How my bones ache. My liver has died in me. When the grass turned brown I started from the cities of the Land of the Throne of Gold. I crossed the salt desert, without companions, and," he added hastily, "without money of any kind."

The eagles from the mountains only snarled at him and went about their business of eating.

"By God's will," went on the astrologer, "I did not perish from the breath of the poison wind. Many's the time I

watched *ghils* dancing at my side. Sometimes they cried to me, sometimes they beckoned me."

The *ghils* were spirits of waste places, arising where the bones of men lay unburied, and supposedly led travelers astray in the salt desert. It was well known that dead men were often found, outstretched and fully clad, without sign of a wound upon them. And when such bodies were lifted, the arms came away from the trunk. Nay, the finger of the passer-by could be thrust into them as if the bodies were no more than dust.

True, some said that it was not the *ghils* but the breath of the *Simúm* wind, the poison wind that dried men up and left them lifeless. But when the heat had been greatest Nureddin had beheld quivering shapes in the air.

"What have I not seen?" He began to boast a little, because after all, he had crossed the salt desert. "Back there, under the rising sun is a war, and such a war!"

"By Allah," grunted one of the Turkomans, "there is no war in Kharesmia."*

Crunching away at his barley, the astrologer lifted his hand and shook his head.

"There is a war! I have seen. The roads are peopled with the flying, and wailing is heard in every village. Aye, the smoke of burning cities hides the sun."

The Turkomans, looking like sitting vultures in the dusk, weighed his words. They were the scavengers of the caravan route, hungry for plunder. But between them and the Land of the Throne of Gold there was the salt desert, and this they had no desire to cross.

"God is one," muttered the taller of the Turkomans. "The war may come even to these mountains."

He was thinking of the caravans of fugitives, but Nureddin who had seen what lifted his hair on his scalp was filled with a new dread. Verily, the slaying and the wailing, the clangor of kettledrums and cymbals, the clash of steel blades might pursue him across the salt desert. The caravanserai and the hills were within the Kharesmian empire—

So thinking he lifted his eyes to the glowing vault of the sky and cried out suddenly, twisting his fingers in his scanty beard.

"*Ahaí! Ahaí!* Look! A portent is to be seen. There, above the ranges—God hath hung the banners of death."

Even the pilgrim in the corner turned on an elbow to scan the sky, and all four were silent. The sunset had taken on an unusual hue, since a light cloud strata stretched from end to end of the horizon. It seemed as if cloud streamers, dyed ruddiest crimson, had been flung athwart the ranges.

"The sign," went on Nureddin shrilly, "is a sure sign. It is the *maut ahmar*, the opening of the pathway to death."

"But it lies in the west," pointed out a Turkoman.

"That is not certain," observed Nureddin, who was troubled by this very fact—he meant to journey to the tranquil towns in the hills where an astrologer of skill and some imagination might set his zodiac between his knees and gather silver in the market place. "The meaning of the sign is that some one who beholds it will be shrouded before the first dawn. And it may be we four are the only beholders."

This did not please the tribesmen, who had their share of superstition, and they called him a dog of an Irani and a pack-saddle of an ass, a father of lies and a son of all dishonor.

"In Meshed is salvation," whispered the old Persian, getting upon his knees to go through the motions of cleansing hands and feet and head before the hour of the *namaz gar* should be past.

"O fool," cried Nureddin, who was bold enough where the sick man was concerned, and ached a little with hunger, besides, "in the hill towns of the west there is rest and ease."

"I go my way," responded the sick man

*The Land of the Throne of Gold, the greatest of the Muhammadan empires of the early thirteenth century, stretching from India to the Caspian Sea. Its ruling cities were Bokhara and Samarkand.

mildly. He leaned heavily on his staff and managed to reach the well, where he filled a wooden bowl—no one thinking to offer him aid. Apparently he did not have any food. "Who knows what may have been written?" he added thoughtfully, pausing to fight for breath, and stifling a moan for fear of angering the Turkomans.

The afterglow still filled the sky, though the fire had left it. The cloud streamers were turning ash gray, but the ground still gave off heat. The volcanic ridges that hemmed in the caravanserai had changed from red and white to shapeless masses without color.

In this quiet of the gathering night, horses' hoofs were heard at a distance.

THE horses were moving at a trot past the caravanserai and the Turkomans noticed that they halted abreast the opening through which the red glimmer of Nureddin's fire might be seen. Then they came on, smartly, toward the well.

Two riders entered the inclosure with a pair of pack horses following. The Turkomans, peering into the dusk, saw that the saddle mounts were splendid beasts—a gray *kohlani*, with long tail and mane, and a powerful bay stallion.

The newcomers glanced around and dismounted, with a click of steel. One—the tallest man Nureddin had ever seen—pulled the loads from the led horses and gathered brush for a fire while the other rubbed down the chargers, talking to them under his breath.

When flame was kindled and caught in the tamarisk, Nureddin had a moment of surprize. The tall stranger wore no helmet; long yellow hair, cut evenly over his brow, fell to his shoulders and his beard was like red gold. Though his skin was burned many shades darker than his hair, his eyes were a light gray.

Beyond doubt he was a warrior, because he was clad in chamois leather, stained and wrinkled by armor. Strapped to his broad belt was a five-foot sword and Nureddin did not fail to notice that empty sockets in the ball of the pommel might once have held jewels. When he moved about the stranger lifted the sword in his hand, and the firelight gleamed on gold inlay within the handguard.

From chin to eye ran the line of an old scar, and Nureddin thought that this warrior could be singled out from a multitude. Evidently a Nazarene, although he did not bear himself like a captive. In other years the astrologer had seen the Nazarene crusaders in the seaport of Antioch.

While the newcomer put an iron pot over the fire and tossed into it dried meat and grain, Nureddin's thin nostrils twitched. When the tall Nazarene, before eating himself, gave to the horses a measure of barley and dry grass, Nureddin rose to his knees. He was half starved and these strangers had food—were, moreover, about to make away with it.

Abruptly the Turkomans got up and left the caravanserai. No sooner had they departed out of hearing than the astrologer scurried over and gave greeting to the warriors.

"Peace to him who directs his steps aright!"

He had spoken in lilting Persian, but the smaller of the two strangers gave response in sonorous Arabic—

"And upon thee be the peace."

"Saddle the horses, and go at once from this place," whispered Nureddin. "Go before moonrise, and spare not the whip. Those Turkomans are vultures. They have seen your blooded steeds, your heavy packs and fine weapons. *Ai!* They have departed like rats in a field to find their brethren, and presently they will come back to slay and strip you."

"Vultures feed only on the dead," said the stranger. "They have seen our swords and they will not be back."

Nureddin wagged his head ominously. He could not understand men who were not afraid of thieves. Enlightenment came to him when he looked more closely at the slender stranger—at the flowing garments of loose black wool, at the hood

that almost hid the braids of hair upon the warrior's forehead.

"*Ai-a*, thou art an Arab, my lord. Surely the chieftain of a tribe!"

"I am a wanderer."

"Verily honor is mine, that I should sit at the fire of a son of Yaman. The honor would be greater if I knew thy name."

"Khalil el Kadr."

Curiosity began to plague the astrologer. Here was an Arab, a Saracen, journeying in company with a Nazarene crusader. Whither? They were without followers, and both were hundreds of leagues from their fellows. Why?

More than that, they were men of birth. The astrologer could read much in the poise of a head and the intonation of a voice accustomed to command and he wondered why they were setting forth upon the salt desert.

"Verily," he pleaded, "the favor of Allah hath been turned from me, until now. I have not tasted food for a night and a day."

"Give the mountebank food," laughed the tall crusader, who understood Arabic.

Khalil el Kadr was silent. He guessed that the astrologer was lying and was utterly unwilling to acknowledge him as a guest at their fire. Khalil was a judge of men, and he read in the tiny blinking eyes of Nureddin weakness, and treachery. Nevertheless, the pride of the Arab would not allow him to refuse anything he had to give when another asked for it—as Nureddin well knew.

Rising abruptly, Khalil went to the well and washed clean a wooden bowl. This he filled with rice and dates from his own platter and barley cakes from the crusader's.

"May God reward thee!" cried Nureddin, reaching forth.

"It is written in the Book to be read," responded Khalil dryly, "that it is well to give to the aged and better to give to the holy ones."

"True," assented Nureddin.

"And so do thou take this bowl to the *hadji*, and partake thyself of what he leaves."

Disconcerted, Nureddin knew better than to refuse, and departed, his slippers flapping over the sand, his long sugar loaf hat bobbing on his head, like an indignant heron deprived of a fish.

EMERGING from the darkness, Nureddin tried to look as if he had not made a full meal. The sick man had eaten little. But the good fare had put new courage into the astrologer, and his curiosity waxed mighty. For a while he watched the tall crusader who had drawn the long straight blade from its leather sheath and was polishing it carefully with a clean cloth, pausing to rub a little oil upon the inlay.

"Eh," he addressed the warrior, "I am no mountebank—no charlatan who vows he can bring rain by piling stones in a certain way! I am Nureddin, the Mirror of Wisdom. None can predict as well as I the *sa'at*—which is, as your nobility comprehends, the hour of commencement of happenings." He folded his short arms and his eyes glimmered under bushy brows. "I have foretold to kings the most auspicious hour for battle, to merchants the day of profit or loss, to beautiful women the hour of the coming of a lover, to ugly ones the advent of a husband. By the wisdom of the stars I have weighed all things. Aye, at the courts of Cathay, Ind, Kharesmia and Iran."

"Of Cathay I have heard," smiled the crusader. "It lies on the far side of the world; but what is Kharesmia?"

"Eh, a place of wonders, a land of gold and honey. Its emperor is called the Shah. He rides upon an elephant, seated beneath a canopy of silk. Wherever he goes it is merry. Houris and *bayaderes*—waiting women and singing girls attend him by hundreds."

Nureddin sighed in remembrance.

"They walk like gazelles, and smell from afar of musk and acacia bloom. Their bodies sway even as feather fans in the wind. And when they dance—"

Puffing out his cheeks, he pressed his fingers together, and blinked.

"Verily there is no court like the Throne of Gold. A thousand black slaves could not carry the Shah's treasure, for it has been gathered from the cities of the Two Rivers and Ind. The softest shining of matched pearls, the fiery rubies of Badakshan, lumps of clear turquoise, diamonds, blue and yellow! His sword-belt would ransom a king, and his turban crest would buy a kingdom. Moreover, in this year of the Serpent, the Shah has lifted the standard of war. It is easy to see that your Grandeur will find work for that sword in Kharesmia, at the court of the Shah, whither, beyond doubt, thou art riding."

"We seek a road," the yellow-haired Nazarene made response.

"What road?"

"To the Sea of the Ravens."

Nureddin blinked and leaned forward to peer into the expressionless face of the crusader.

"And why? Surely that is a jest, my lord!"

"Is the way known to thee, O Mirror of Wisdom?"

"Indeed, and indeed! I have stood on the shore of the sea. But thou—O prince of the Nazarenes, that road is not to be traveled by thee!"

The crusader lifted his sword in one hand, although it weighed nearly as much as Nureddin, and thrust it into the leather sheath. Leaning back against one of the packs, he looked at the astrologer inquiringly.

"Verily, I would serve thee, my lord," Nureddin chattered on. "Not since the day of Iskander* hath a man of thy race set eyes on the Sea of the Ravens. Here, in the caravan track, are merchants that pass to and fro, and few are found to question thee. But beyond this place the life of an infidel is forfeit."

"Eh, where lies the road?"

"There be many—and there is none. Look!" He pointed up at the dark line of summits under the glitter of the stars. "To the west and north are the hills. Beyond are the higher ranges, and the pastures of the Turkomans. They would cut the head from an unbeliever and set it over a tower gate."

The crusader nodded understanding, and Nureddin wondered how he had come by his knowledge of Arab speech.

"Be warned!" he went on quickly. "It were better to cross the salt desert, better to seek the court of the Shah, than to go into yonder passes."

Again the Nazarene nodded assent.

"To thee, my lord," Nureddin pointed out, "God hath given a mighty stature, a lion's mane, and a voice like a trumpet. A razor could shave the hair, and the garments of a believer might cover the limbs—but can a lion be made to pass as a leopard? Nay, and indeed nay! Without disguise, an unbeliever may not win through the mountains of the Turkomans."

For the third time the listener made a sign of assent, as if he were weighing this in his mind.

"A way may be found," Nureddin observed shrewdly. "The stars will point the way."

"Of all fools," growled Khalil under his hood, "the greatest are they that prophesy."

"Tck-tck! To cast the light of understanding into the shadows of the future is not folly. For a silver *dinar*, my lord Nazarene, I will trace thy fate in the stars."

Hastily the astrologer drew from his breast a parchment bearing the signs of the zodiac, and smoothed a space of sand before him.

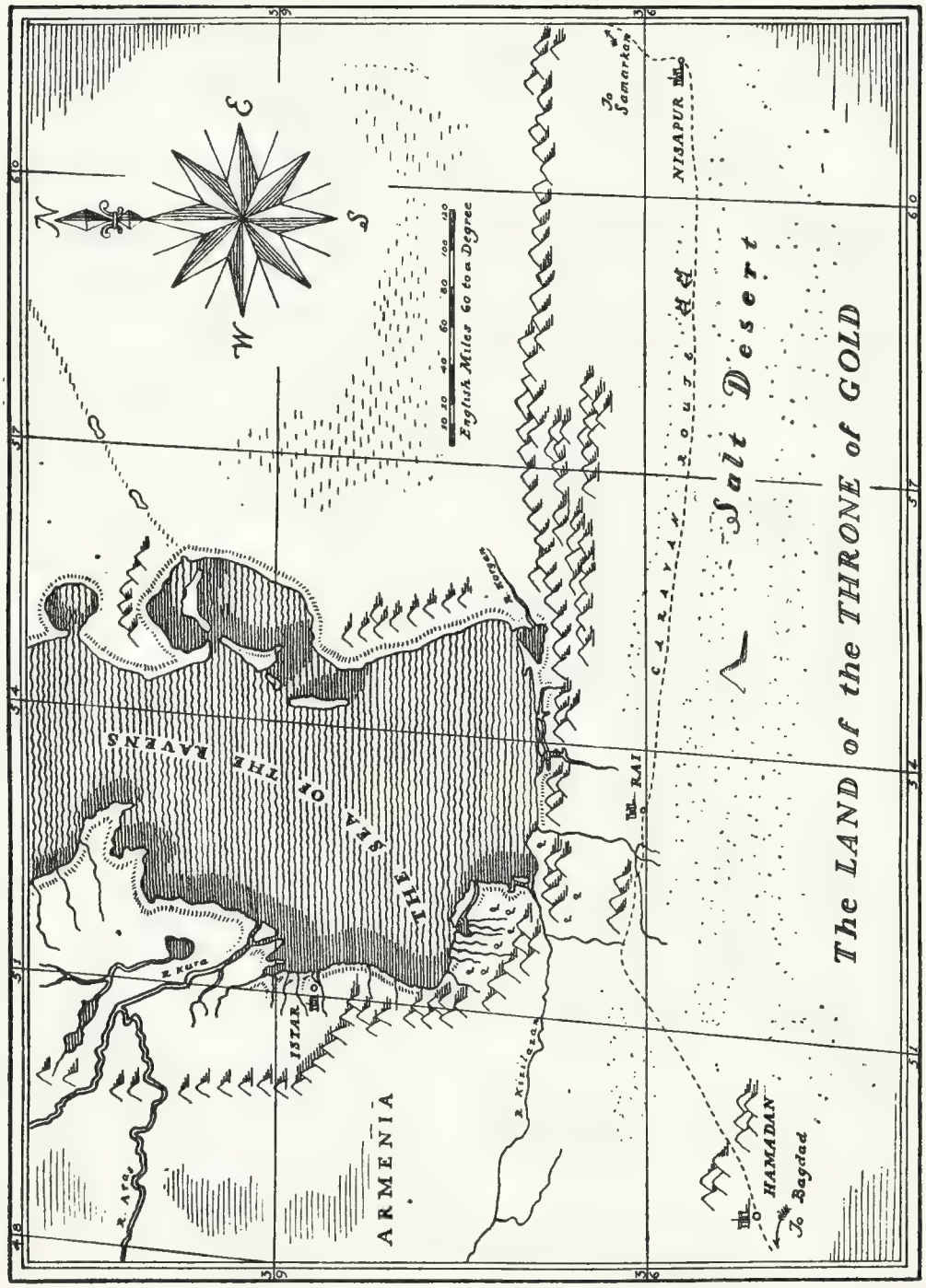
"Thy birth, hour and day and year? The place?"

A smile touched the dark face of the crusader.

"The eve of Candlemas, in the year good King Richard sailed for the Holy Land," he said in English.

By Khalil's aid this was explained to Nureddin, who began to draw lines and symbols and make calculations in the sand.

*Alexander the Great, who conquered most of Asia sixteen centuries before the crusades and whose name was still a thing to conjure with.


The LAND of the THRONE of GOLD
Salt Desert
SEA OF THE LAVENS
ARMENIA
NISAPUR
To Samarkand
HAMADAN
To Bagdad
RAI
ISTAK
R. Kura
R. Araxes
R. Kizilozan
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E

"*Ai*, my lord, that was a time of war, and verily the sign of war is large in thy life." He frowned over his figures, muttering. "Thus stood the planets in their houses then." Glancing at the sky, he added gravely, "Misfortune hath come upon thee, O Nazarene, at the hand of a great king in the west and a fulness of misfortune is yet in store for thee. And this is strange—strange."

He shook his head, sunk in meditation that was not at all assumed. "It is not clear which road is best to follow. All are alike. And yet two signs befriend thee. Look for the coming of the Dragon and the Archer—they will aid thee."

All at once his eyes gleamed, and he held out his hand to the warriors.

"May it please your Nobility—a silver *dinar* of full weight was promised."

"We have heard," grinned Khalil, who had no patience with Persian soothsayers, "the bleating of a goat. Begone!"

He drew a coin from his wallet and tossed it on the sand without looking at it. Nureddin snatched it up and held it to the firelight, astonished that it was gold.

"May God reward the giver!" he cried joyfully. "May the calamity be averted from the head of the hero. Fail not to watch for the Dragon and the Archer!"

And he shambled off, to bury himself in his cloak and think of ways of getting more gold from the warriors.

"If he had learned thy name, O my brother," the Arab said grimly, "he would have betrayed thee for a *bezant*."

"And yet he spoke of my foe, in the west."

"Guessing that we fled from a powerful enemy. As for archers, we have seen enough of them, but I have reined my horse through many lands and have never set eyes upon a dragon."

WHILE the Arab slept, the crusader kept watch, listening to the snuffling of the horses, the moans of the sick pilgrim and the snores of the astrologer. Sitting in the shadow of the packs, his sword across his knees, he meditated.

He had learned to wield a sword, a child playing with the Norman men-at-arms in the courtyard of his father's hold in England. Mightier in body than his fellow lads and quick of eye and hand, he had been able to meet grown men on even terms.

That part of his life, twenty years ago, was a dim memory—the stables, the horses he had known, the hours spent with the falconers and the bowyers. Before he had risen to the dignity of an esquire-at-arms a priest had come through the countryside proclaiming a summons to the Holy Land.

The lad Hugh had taken the cross and given the pledge never to turn back until he reached Jerusalem.

And that oath he had kept. Twelve years he had warred against the Saracens. And of the comrades who had first assembled in the camps of France at the summons to arms—who were living?

Sickness had taken some on the long journey overland to Venice. They had fought the battles of the Pope, had stormed Constantinople to pay their debt to the Venetians for the ships that were to carry them onward to the shores of Palestine. The ships, continually promised as soon as the season permitted, were never forthcoming.

Instead there had been campaigns against the pagan Bulgars and the Slavs —why, Sir Hugh did not know. Himself, he had never seen the fief of Taranto which had been bestowed on him by Baldwin, Count of Flanders. And Baldwin had been thrown into a pit and slain by the Bulgars.

A few, mostly Italians and Swabians, had gone back to their homes. Eight hundred had crossed the Sea of Marmora to join the Greek emperor in an expedition against the Saracens. And of this eight hundred only Sir Hugh survived.

Tricked and betrayed by Theodore Lascaris, the Greek emperor, the crusaders had been cut down by the Muhammadans while the host of the Greeks remained aloof, looking on.

Thanks to Khalil, whose band of Arabs

had swooped down on the field to plunder, Sir Hugh and one other crusader had reached Jerusalem alive. Before the gates of the Sepulchre, Sir Hugh's comrade-in-arms had been slain by a servant of Theodore Lascaris. The long sword of the knight had cut down the murderer, but Sir Hugh knew well that he was being hunted by all the agents of the Greek emperor.

For Theodore Lascaris, knowing that he lived, sought to silence this one voice that might proclaim his treachery to the barons of Christendom. The emperor must make certain of the death of this survivor of the massacre. And the arm of Theodore Lascaris stretched far into Asia.

Sir Hugh had become a marked man with a price on his head that kept every Levantine and Genoese, every Armenian and Jewish merchant searching for him. He could not fare to the seaports and the roads of the north all led to Constantinople.

An exile, he had gone into the barren lands behind Palestine with Khalil, taking refuge among Muhammadans from the enmity of a Christian.

With the Arabs, he had learned the swift and merciless warfare of the tribes. He had taken his part in raids and had mastered the language of the nomads. Khalil, admiring his strength and wondering a little at the silence and quietude of the crusader, had besought him to come to the land of the black tents, to take a girl to wife and abide with the clan until the end of his days.

"Many horses have been taken by thee, O my friend. Thou art as my right arm in all things. Consider that in the getting and the rearing of sons there is joy and pride, and solace in companions."

But with Sir Hugh there went always eight hundred companions, unforgotten and always to be thought upon—who had died, tormented by thirst, torn by the arrows of the Turks, who had been sacrificed to the ambition of the Greek emperor. And Sir Hugh did not mean that they should be long unavenged.

With Khalil at his side, he searched for a way back to Christendom, penetrating deeper into the dry lands.

SIR HUGH roused from his reverie. No sound had disturbed him but the horses had stopped munching. The moon had come up over the plain, and flooded the caravanserai and the sleeping men with white radiance. And the horses had lifted their heads.

The moon was still low on the horizon and the gray plain seemed full of illusion. Shadows came and vanished and presently the crusader made out groups of horsemen moving toward him out of the desert.

He touched Khalil on the shoulder and the Arab sat up, glancing at the horses, then at the sky.

"*Ai-al*" A voice wailed suddenly near at hand. "They have come after me. Look! They are the *ghils*. O, brothers of misfortune!"

Nureddin had rolled out of his cloak, and was gathering his pack together with quivering fingers.

"Do the *ghils* ride camels?" asked Khalil, thrusting forward his sword sling. "Nay, these be men—but what men?"

Camel bells clanked, a horse neighed and Nureddin ran to the wall.

"Allah be praised! They are not *ghils* but they may be Turkomans, come to loot and slay."

Sir Hugh glanced at Khalil, who shook his head. The riders who had come out of the desert moved with the stumbling gait of utter weariness. The horses were no more than bones and sweating hides. One paced through a break in the wall, and a man swung down stiffly from the saddle, peering into shadows until he saw the well.

"*Allah kerim!*"

Drawing his simitar, he took his stand before the well, a lean, pockmarked warrior, his brocade cloak thrown back from a hairy chest. Long-handled daggers filled the front of his girdle and his slant eyes were baneful as a hawk's.

Evidently he was feared, because the

riders who came in after him did not venture to drink, or to allow their horses within stretch of the well.

"Whence are ye?" cried Khalil.

The warrior who stood guard at the water glanced at the Arab and snarled.

"*Kum dan*—from the sands."

Camels padded up, grunting, and knelt complainingly. Dust rose around the forms of the desert riders who soon filled the caravanserai and squatted on the ground outside. Some one kindled a horn lantern and hung it from a spear thrust into the ground.

Black slaves, glistening with sweat, staggered up bearing burdens and after them came a cavalcade of turbaned men in multicolored cloaks, their gaunt ponies decked out in fringed trappings. They were escorting, apparently, a white camel carrying a carpet shelter. Bells tinkled as the camel knelt, while the men of the cavalcade dismounted and clustered around it.

Standing aloof, Sir Hugh and Khalil saw the carpet shelter quiver and yield up a hooded figure that passed quickly into a silk pavilion, set up by the slaves. At once warriors with drawn swords took post at the pavilion entrance. The dust subsided as men formed into groups and squatted down, while the horses were led outside.

The first comer sheathed his blade and filled a water jar at the well, bearing it into the pavilion. Not until then did the others satisfy their thirst.

CHAPTER II

THE GRAY HORSE

NUREDDIN had departed to ask questions and learn what gossip the new arrivals might have. He was certain that some woman of a chieftain's household or some very wealthy merchant was in the pavilion, because camels bearing light packs continued to come in from the trail, escorted by warriors, mounted and afoot.

And he returned full of news, to the sick man's corner whither Sir Hugh and Khalil had betaken themselves with their belongings and horses.

"They are Kharesmians—men from the Throne of Gold. Around the pavilion are officers and others in robes of honor. I heard talk of the Shah, and surely there is a woman of the imperial household in this *serai*."

But the Arab had been watching events with attentive interest.

"The braying of an ass is unpleasant," he remarked grimly, "and so also are the words of an idle prophet."

The eyes of the astrologer were hidden under shaggy brows.

"Nay, I have seen black eunuchs and white slaves. Incense is burning in the pavilion."

Khalil nodded at the moon and at the horses of the Kharesmians that were tethered outside the wall.

"It is no more than the fourth hour of Throughout the day—aye, until this hour, the night, yet the steeds be overdriven. they have been ridden. *Wallahi!* What woman of the Throne of Gold would come so swiftly and so far?"

"Nay, the grandees, the weapon men, the slaves—whom would they escort if not a woman?"

Receiving no answer, Nureddin went to lead his ass from the caravanserai before any one should notice that he had not done so and should kick him. If indeed an amir of Kharesmia were in the pavilion, no animals would be permitted to remain within the wall.

Khalil squatted down where he was partly in shadow and motioned his friend to do likewise. For a while he watched the men of the caravan, trying to understand their talk.

"They are indeed Kharesmians," he whispered presently, "lords of Islam, and uncurried devils. O my brother, they have no love for an unbeliever, and their mood is one of little patience. Put on thy hauberk and helm. We will lead out the horses.'"

Without questioning, the crusader drew his mail from one of the packs and

put it on, while the Arab roped the packs together. They were saddling the horses when a tall warrior strode up and stood between them—the same Kharesmian who had taken charge of the well and its water.

So close did he thrust himself that the necklace on his matted chest was distinct in the moonlight, and the necklace was made of many things—of women's opal rings, ear pendants and anklets of jade. From it hung a human nose, small and wrinkled.

"The hour of your going is not yet," he snarled.

Coming up to the horses, he looked them over with an experienced eye, especially the gray stallion of the Arab.

"And why?" smiled Khalil, drawing tight the girth. "The moon is high, and surely it is time to put foot in stirrup."

"Whither?"

"There be many roads. We go where we will."

"The horses are fresh—not lame?"

Khalil, thrusting the bit between the charger's teeth, made no answer. The beasts of the Kharesmians were done up and it was likely that the pockmarked warrior would wish to trade or buy one of the pack horses. Other men of the caravan approached, staring at the tall form of the crusader.

"This is the following of the Amir Omar," quoth he of the necklace. "Make now the earth-kissing salaam, for he draws near."

But Khalil only bent his head and touched his breast as an elder Muhammadan came through the throng, a man who carried himself well in spite of years, who was clad in a flowered silk *khalat* girdled with a green sash. The face of the Amir Omar was gaunt and lined, the eyebrows gray and the thin beard below the slit of a mouth stained brilliant henna-red.

"What men are ye?" asked the Kharesmian lord.

"From Jerusalem, O *Khoudsarma*."

"And he? Verily, he is an unbeliever, an accursed!"

In the glow of the horn lantern the tawny hair of the crusader had caught the attention of the amir, who glanced curiously at the long sword and the plain steel basinet.

"Aye, an unbeliever," Khalil replied boldly. "A chieftain of Frankistan* who hath performed a pilgrimage to the shrine of his prophet. Now he seeks the road to his own land. There is a truce between his people and mine."

"Not a stone falls save by the will of Allah." The amir inclined his head as if meditating piously on the strange companionships brought about by fate. "Verily, the wolf runs with the jackal—the Arab with the Nazarene. Until now I had never set eyes on a Christian warrior. That is a heavy sword. I would like to take it in my hand."

Sir Hugh would have spoken, but Khalil made answer swiftly.

"That is a sword without peer, a blade unmatched. It hath name and fame."

Omar nodded courteously. A good weapon, a finely forged simitar that could be bent pliantly, would assuredly have a name, and would pass from father to son through generations—its history repeated as often as the pedigree of a famous horse.

"And yet," he objected, "no blade is the peer of Zulzakar, the two-edged, the sower of destruction, the flaming simitar of the Prophet than whom there is no other."

The words were a rebuke to Khalil who had praised the weapon of an unbeliever above others. And the listening Kharesmians murmured assent.

"O lord of the Throne of Gold," retorted the Arab, "the merit of this sword is otherwise. He who fashioned it in bygone days made it mighty in weight and potent in edge. And in the beginning it was the sword of the Frankish knight Roland, whose fame is known even to my people. And its name is Durandal."

"A strange name."

"In the hand of the palladin Roland it won battles for the Franks. When it was carried off by the Moors, no man was

* Europe.

found who could swing it over his head, even with two hands. So it hung in the hall of the sultan, Kai-Kosru, until the coming of this knight who slew Kai-Kosru."

Again the Kharesmians murmured, and Khalil's white teeth flashed in a smile, because nothing pleased him better than to tell of the deeds of Sir Hugh.

"None can wield the sword Durandal save this Nazarene—nor will he suffer another to take it in hand. With it, he held the gate of Antioch against five thousand Greeks, and they did not pass over him. *Ya hai*, then did the bright steel flash and blood hissed from the stricken!"

"And yet—" Omar fingered his red beard reflectively—"this warrior is an infidel from the tribe of the Cross. And thou art his brother."

"Aye, his *rafik*, his brother of the road! We have shared the salt."

"Ha! This, thy horse, pleases me. He is fine in the limb, and there is courage in his eye. Surely Allah hath made him swift of foot."

Khalil's jaw thrust out and his hand tightened on the bridle of the stallion. Omar was asking—after the manner of princes—that the gray horse Khutb be given him. To ask an Arab of birth to sell his saddle horse would have been an insult unforgivable. Khutb was Khalil's most prized possession—as much a part of him as his right arm.

"He is Khutb," Khalil said quietly. "Between sunup and sundown he could carry me to Rai."

The amir stepped forward to stroke the soft muzzle of the stallion, and run his fingers through the long mane.

"My steed is foundered," he said. "Give me thine, and thou shalt not go unrewarded."

This was sheer arrogance, for no man would willingly give up his horse in the desert. And Khalil, his arm across the shoulder of the stallion, shook his head, smiling.

"May Allah forgive thee!" he responded.

Still fondling the charger's mane, Omar lifted his hand. Sir Hugh heard breath indrawn, and saw the warrior of the necklace leap through the air. Steel flickered, and Khalil staggered back against Khutb, the blade of a long, curved *kindjhal* buried under his heart.

The Arab stretched to his full height, and grasped at the hilt of his simitar. He drew the sword and lifted his arm, when his body swayed, and he cried out:

"Ho, brother—go, with Khutb! Take him!"

An arrow crashed against the mailed chest of the crusader. Men closed in on him, and swords grated from sheaths. Sir Hugh could not draw his long blade in time to meet the onset.

So sudden had been the attack, so wanton the knifing of Khalil that Sir Hugh acted by instinct—striking out with his mailed fist. He smashed two of the Kharesmians to the ground, and caught the blade of another in his mittened fingers, pulling the man to one side. Something thudded against his light steel helm and red flashes veiled his sight.

Bareheaded—for the blow of a mace had knocked off the basinet—he staggered back. Khutb reared and snorted beside him, and he turned swiftly, leaping into the saddle of the stallion.

This gained for him a moment of respite. Khutb, wise in battle, reared again, lashing out with his fore feet. Sir Hugh found the stirrups barely in time to keep his seat, and by then his sight had cleared enough for him to make out Khalil kneeling and watching.

Bringing down the horse, Sir Hugh quickly warded off a simitar blow with his arm, and reached down to pull the Arab to the saddle.

But Khalil, dying, a smile on his drawn lips, flung himself back under the weapons of his foes, out of the reach of his comrade's hand. In his fading consciousness one thing was clear—the charger could never carry the two of them to safety. And his own hour was at hand; for him, the end of the road—

Neighing, Khuth reared again, and the

on-pressing Kharesmians gave back hastily. One of them thrust his simitar through Khalil's throat, shouting savagely. Upon this warrior Sir Hugh wheeled the frantic horse. Lashing hoofs struck the man down and he rolled over, voiceless, his forehead crushed in.

Sir Hugh had seen the death stroke given Khalil, and knew in that instant there was no mortal aid for his companion of the road.

Tightening the rein, he struck spurs into Khutb's flanks and plunged through the Muhammadans. Once clear of the corner, he turned sharply and galloped toward the entrance. Men stood in his path, but none ventured to seize the rein of the gray horse. Javelins whistled past him, but the moonlight was elusive and Khutb's swift turn disconcerting.

Passing the silk pavilion, a flicker of lights caught the eye of the crusader. The opening flap had been thrown back, and he beheld a shimmering carpet that stretched to a couch, and on the couch a man who had risen to his elbow to peer out.

A stout figure, at once powerful and indolent, a broad pale face with a heavy jowl and restless brown eyes, a turban of green silk, close wrapped and falling at the end over a massive chest, and in the turban a crest of precious stones that reflected the gleam of the pavilion lamps—all this Sir Hugh saw clearly, each detail distinct.

Wheeling Khutb suddenly, he came to a stop. His clenched right hand he lifted above his bare head.

"For Christ and the Sepulchre!"

The deep battle shout of the crusader rang out above the clamor of the Kharesmians. And the sight of Sir Hugh gave them pause, for he loomed above them in the moonlight that gleamed in his tawny hair.

Then he vanished through the caravanserai gate. No one rode in pursuit because the horses of the Kharesmians were spent, and the Amir Omar claimed the big bay charger of the crusader for his own.

SIR HUGH did not go far. Behind a knoll screened with tamarisk brush he tethered Khutb and waited for the pursuit that did not come. Waited until the sun burst up, over the salt-streaked plain, and he could watch the Kharesmians.

They did not linger for the dawn prayer, but set out toward the hills. His eyes were keen, and he saw the white camel go forth attended by the same Muhammadan cavaliers—one of them riding his charger. Then the dust began to rise over the caravan and he could see only the men who swung out to the flank to keep clear of it.

The horses went forward slowly and it was a long time before the last of the followers had disappeared into the dust. No sooner had they gone than vultures dropped from the sky, and crows began to blacken the caravanserai wall.

Leading Khutb, the crusader went back to bury his comrade. At the wall he paused, hearing a gentle and resonant voice intoning:

"*Ma tadri nafsun ma dha taksibu ghadan*—" The sick *hadji*, kneeling by Khalil's body, was repeating verses from the Koran. "No soul knoweth what the morrow shall have brought; neither knoweth any soul in what land it shall die. Verily, God alone knoweth all things."

Painfully the *hadji* was winding around the body of the warrior a shroud that he had fashioned out of his turban cloth. When he looked up and saw the crusader standing over him, he nodded as if he had expected Sir Hugh.

"Why art thou here?" asked the knight.

The *hadji* meditated.

"Eh, the road is long to Meshed, the holy city, and there was talk of war."

"Did Nureddin, the astrologer, go with the caravan?"

"It may have happened." The thin Muhammadan looked around uncertainly. "He is not here. It was a calamity that came upon thy friend."

Sir Hugh did not answer. Khalil had been at his side for years; they had gone

hungry together and had shared the torments of heat, the wild exhilaration of conflict. Khalil had left his tribe to try to discover a way for the crusader to join his people.

Silently the big man in armor dug a grave in the loose clay by the wall, while the pilgrim watched. To make the grave he was forced to use the blade of Durandal, lacking any other tool. When he had covered the Arab's body with earth, he rolled several massive stones from the wall to the grave to keep it from being dug up by wolves.

This done he bethought him of Khutb and led the horse to the well, and a moment later rejoined the *hadji*, his face serious.

"The water, O father, hath been fouled with dung and dirt."

"It was the doing of the Kharesmians."

"Why?"

The pilgrim shook his head vaguely. "My son, it is not clear to me. They came, and they slew and they spoiled the water. Then they went away."

"With little rest." Leaning on his sword, Sir Hugh thought for a while. "Tell me, O *hadji*, who was the chief of the caravan?"

"He of the white camel."

"What name had he?"

"My son, it is not known to me. There was the Amir Omar, but he waited upon the prince who sat in the pavilion." He pondered this for a while, while the crusader waited patiently. "And thou, O Nazarene, thou wert seeking a road. Whither?"

"My father, I have found a road. I shall follow the trail of this prince of the Land of the Throne of Gold, to make atonement for the slaying of my companion."

Gently, the pilgrim shook his head, peering up at the erect form of the warrior.

"That is a road of peril. They are going to Rai, which is the first city on the Bagdad way. They be many and thou, my son, art a Nazarene."

"Come! There is a horse awaiting thee. Here no good water may be had, and thou lackest food."

Again the *hadji* shook his head, his brown eyes introspective.

"It was the kismet of thy friend that he should be shrouded in this spot. Eh, so do the warriors pass from the earth in the fulness of strength, bathed in their blood. With me it is otherwise. My strength is little. For a while I shall recite verses from the leaves of the Book unfolded. Then I go toward the Holy City."

Sir Hugh remembered the years he had spent in fighting his way to the walls of Jerusalem. This quiet man with the lined face was filled with the same purpose. He glanced a last time at Khalil's rock-covered grave and lifted his hand.

"Upon thee, my father, be the peace!"

Then he went to Khutb, felt of the saddle girth and lengthened the stirrups. Swinging into the high-peaked saddle, he reined out of the caravanserai, scattering the crows in raucous protest, and headed toward the hills in the west.

"On the day of judgment every woman that hath a burden shall cast her burden; and thou shalt see men drunken, yet they are not drunken; but it is the mighty chastisement of God."

So the *hadji* cried out, and his cry echoed in the ears of the crusader who had gone forth to seek atonement for the death of his friend.

CHAPTER III

MIR BEG

THE trail of the caravan led into the foothills, and began to dip into gullies. Around the crusader brittle, volcanic ledges arose, and the heat grew terrifying.

There was no enduring the weighty steel mail on his body, and he had rolled up hauberk and coif and mittens, binding them on the saddle. Out of the Arab's cotton saddle-cloth he had fashioned a hood that shielded his head from the sun's rays.

His helm, Khalil's sword, and even the

weapons of the dead Kharesmians in the caravanserai had been carried off, and no scrap of food had been left behind.

The trail turned and ran under the face of a yellow cliff and dipped into a bed of dry stream, strewn with worn sandstone and smooth rocks. Here Sir Hugh dismounted to ease Khutb, who was beginning to sweat in the neck and withers.

As he did so he had a glimpse of something moving above him. It might have been the flutter of rags over some shrine, but there was no wind and apparently no shrine anywhere near. More likely the end of a cloak had been whipped out of sight. He listened, and was aware of a distant crackling of brush.

Going forward as if he had noticed nothing at all, he scanned the slopes of the gully. They were steep, sun-hardened clay with fringes of dead grass in cracks, too steep for the passage of horse or man, but not too high for an arrow's flight.

Sir Hugh strode on, glancing casually to right and left, ears alert. He heard no more movement above him. If the Kharesmians had left watchers at the gut of the riverbed, or if wandering Turkomans had sighted him, they would have dismounted and crept to cover with their bows.

Presently he saw what he was seeking. On the left appeared a cross gully, filled with spindly poplars, the bed of a smaller stream. And he noticed hoof marks in the soil under the trees. Entering the little ravine, he tethered Kutb where the horse could easily be seen from above.

Then he went on, until the poplars hid the blazing sky, and a nest of boulders, covered with thorn and creepers, was close at hand. Drawing the long sword from its sheath, he moved silently into the rocks, stooping and climbing until he lay prone in deep shadow between two granite blocks.

He could hear Kutb stamping restlessly a hundred feet away, but he could see nothing beyond the screen of the poplars and the overhang of the rock. Nor did he try to see down into the gully.

Not a leaf rustled, not a bird stirred in the gully. He sat up to relieve the pounding of blood in his ears, but the silence was unbroken. The temptation to rise and look at the horse was well-nigh overwhelming. And then Kutb whinnied.

The crusader took the hilt of the sword in both hands and placed his ear against the rock. Nearby there was a faint sound as of something sliding and slipping. And then a sibilant call:

"*Ohai*, Gutchluk!"

Sir Hugh did not hear the response, for the voice—and it seemed familiar in some way—went on:

"He has gone to seek water, or he sleeps. Take thou the horse."

This time the listener caught the murmur of an answer, below him.

"I will watch," went on the first voice. "Come thou back and take shelter across the *nullah*."

Two men, at least, were near him, and before long one would lead Kutb away, which was not the crusader's intention. He rose to one knee, striving to make out his neighbors. The man below him, the one called Gutchluk, began to speak again, and the other snarled angrily:

"What if we did not see the dog of a Nazarene? He is a fool, to go and look for water in this place of *shaitan*. He was a fool to ride after us, and I shall carry his head to—" breaking off, the invisible Muhammadan added surlily— "Wait, and I will attend to the horse."

The sliding began again, more distinctly, a few yards to one side. The creepers shook and cracked, and Sir Hugh stood up, climbing swiftly to the top of the boulder that had concealed him. Without pausing, he leaped down.

He had seen two men directly under him and his knees struck the one who held a bow, squarely between the shoulders. The impact of the giant Nazarene with the weight of the sword he gripped, snapped the Muhammadan's spine and drove his body face down into the sand and stones. The crusader rolled over, springing to his feet with sword upraised.

The other man had turned with the flash of a simitar sliding from sheath.

And as he turned he leaped, lips writhing and slant eyes gleaming. The steel blades clanged, as the crusader parried the simitar's stroke.

Then Sir Hugh laughed and stepped forward, striking once and twice, lightly as if in play. The sweep of the long blade forced the Muhammadan to retreat toward the rocks, until the Nazarene stopped and spoke to him.

"Thou art he who slew a nobler man. Tell me thy name."

The pockmarked face of the Muhammadan sharpened, and his slant eyes shifted from side to side. Suddenly he began to pant, the necklace of women's trinkets stirring on his dripping chest.

"I am Mir Beg," he growled, "the slayer, the sower of destruction."

It amazed him that the Nazarene should have come upon him out of the very air, and should address him in fluent Arabic. Amazement was edged by fear, that made Mir Beg as dangerous as a trodden snake.

"Taste then," answered Sir Hugh, "the fruit of thy seed." And he lowered the point of his sword.

Mir Beg moved as a wolf leaps. He crouched and sprang to a boulder, waist-high. And then he whirled, his *khalat* flying out, his simitar upflung. Had the crusader run in, or had he raised his long sword, Mir Beg would have slain him. For the Kharesmian warrior made no attempt to climb the rocks. Instead he crouched and flung himself bodily at the crusader.

Without moving his feet, Sir Hugh lifted the point of his sword, gripping the hilt strongly and thrusting. The blade entered Mir Beg below the ribs, and his body slid down until the handguard checked it. Sir Hugh lowered him to the ground, freed the blade with a wrench, and wiped it clean carefully.

When life had passed out of Mir Beg, he took the necklace from the Kharesmian's throat and thrust it into his wallet. For a moment he pondered stripping the garments from the other warrior and putting them on. But he remembered the words of Nureddin—that no disguise could make him out a Muhammadan.

So he searched up the hillside until he found the horses of the Kharesmians, and in the saddle-bags a little cheese and barley. More precious than food was the small goatskin tied to a saddle-horn and half full of warm, sulphurish water.

When Kutb had had water enough to rinse out his teeth, the crusader drank and ate sparingly and slept during the hours of intolerable heat.

Then he stripped the saddle from the better of the two horses—which had doubtlessly belonged to Mir Beg—and led him by the rein when he rode back to the riverbed.

Until sunset they climbed steadily, following the broad trail of the caravan. And when the road crossed the summit of the pass, he turned in the saddle for a last look at the salt desert and the caravanserai where Khalil had been buried.

The shadow of the foothills extended far out upon the plain, hiding the site of the caravanserai. Sir Hugh looked long and steadily, shading his eyes from the glare of the sky.

Black dots were moving across the gray floor of the desert—dots that might be antelope or horsemen. After a while he did not think they were antelope, because they advanced so steadily in groups, heading in upon the riverbed.

"Nay," he thought, with a smile, "Nureddin would say they were *ghils*, forsooth."

It seemed to him they must be another caravan of Kharesmians riding, like the first, in haste, and if so he must look for foes behind as well as before him. But as he touched Kutb with the rein and started down the pass, he wondered why men should ride like that during the middle of the day and why Kharesmians should be coming in such numbers to these hills.

TWENTY-FOUR hours later Sir Hugh rode into sight of the city of Rai.*

He had not pressed on too rapidly,

*Modern Teheran.

because he did not wish to pass the caravan of the Amir Omar. Still it was clear to him that the caravan had made a forced march. Dying horses and sick camels lay by the trail; here and there stragglers toiled along on foot or sat by the wells, too weary to be curious when the Nazarene trotted by.

He had descended steadily from the first pass, and now the aspect of the country had changed. The white walls of villages gleamed on the hillsides, and buffaloes worked in the fields; along the trail came donkeys and women nearly buried under burdens, with a bearded and barelegged man stalking behind carrying nothing heavier than a javelin and the inevitable simitar. These people stared silently at the crusader, at his gambeson of yellow leather, his bare arms and knees burned dark by the desert sun, at his head half hidden under its white hood and—covetously—at the splendid stallion he rode. No Christian warrior had ever set foot in this land so many leagues behind Jerusalem, before now. And the Muhammadans must have imagined him some giant from India or Cathay.

Others might have troubled to question him—horsemen who were descending from the villages and moving toward Rai in the late hours of dusk. These Sir Hugh avoided and on the last ridge before the city he halted to study his surroundings.

Rai lay like a crumb in the bottom of a wide and very shallow basin—a green basin, for here the desert ended and groves of willows and poplars bordered the road, and water glinted in the distance.

Beyond the broad oasis stretched the same line of purple mountains, a golden haze flooding the jagged summits and the ridges and towers that were like the battlements of a citadel rising from the bowels of the earth to the higher altitudes. Again Sir Hugh saw on his right the solitary snow peak, visible through a veil of clouds.

It was to cross these ranges that he had come up from the south with Khalil, and now he decided to ride into Rai. He needed food, and he meant to learn the name of the prince who had watched from the pavilion the murder of Khalil. So he reined forward into the soft dusk, and the horses, snuffing the cool air of the valley, tossed their heads and trotted briskly.

Many others were on the trail that twilight. Stout little nobles appeared in intersecting paths, attended by warriors and slaves bearing torches—*mirs* and *begs*, in gleaming silk and tinted shagreen, their reins heavy with silver, their horses brave in tasseled headbands and caparisons of damask and cloth-of-gold. Beside the nobles on ponies rode sad-faced boys with jeweled simitars thrust through girdles—rode, too, heavily veiled women on camels and carts surrounded by black slaves with spears.

These were no fellow pilgrims of the road, but pleasure seekers, and the crusader thought that there must be a festival in Rai and Rai must be a rich city. He was hard put to keep out of the torch and lantern light, until an avenue of poplars loomed out of the night and he turned aside into the fields.

It was near to midnight and moonrise when he approached a gate of the city wall and touched Kutb on the neck. Men were loitering in the shadow under the tiled arch, and—though they did not seem to be guards—they had seen him. Better to go ahead swiftly than to hang back.

Under the white hood his eyes were alert, but the loungers did no more than glance enviously at Kutb. He turned blindly into the darkest alley, and threaded through piles of refuse and snarling dogs until the odor of bad butter and worse meat yielded to the smell of matting and wine and he bent in the saddle to escape the low awnings of a bazaar.

All Rai was awake and awhisper, late though the hour might be. As if in the depths of caverns, red lights glowed under rings of bearded faces, lanterns bobbed from stall to stall.

Overhead a drum muttered sonorously, and a voice took up its song. Somewhere

on the roofs, another cried out thrice:

"Be of light heart, all ye who believe, for this is a night among nights."

The crusader kept to the darkest alleys, feeling the mud walls of dwellings brush his shoulders, avoiding lights and cleared spaces. One lane led into another, turning and twisting and the smells multiplied and changed, until he sniffed musk and burning incense and found his way blocked by a fat man who blundered from wall to wall, his turban lopsided, his shawl girdle trailing.

"*Ei, ba'tyr,*" a lisping Persian voice proclaimed. "Eh, my warrior, it is time to sheath the sword and dismount from the saddle of discomfort."

"Is there a festival?" Sir Hugh asked guardedly, suspecting correctly that the stout Muhammadan was drunk.

"Indeed and indeed, by command of the shadow of God on earth, the *Shahim-shah,* upon whose name be—" he coughed and looked around uncertainly—"ex-termination." Then he chuckled. "Consider, O my Arab, a pair of bees feed from the same flowers, yet one giveth forth honey, the other a sting; both deer eat the same grass, yet one giveth forth dung, the other musk. And now consider women, my friend, they subsist on the same goat's milk and sugar paste, but one will embrace you and another scratch you. Man," he added solemnly, "is a magic lantern with a light within. So saith that cup-shot prater, Omar. But I say a woman is a veil without any light at all!"

He gathered up his girdle and tried laboriously to wind it on again by turning around and around. This upset him and he sat down heavily against the wall while Sir Hugh moved past.

"Allah hath promised wine in Paradise," he called after the crusader. "Then why is wine on earth a vice? Omar said that and I say it, too. Both of us!"

His stentorian voice had attracted attention because a casement opened just above the hooded head of the rider. A soft voice greeted him:

"*Ai-a,* my lord, there is dust and weariness upon the road. Wilt have ease and refreshment?"

Then Sir Hugh was aware of other sounds in the alley, of anklets clashing faintly, a guitar's distant note, a murmur of voices. Men did not go through this street with lights and the dwellings were all discreetly screened, yet he thought the disciple of Omar had emerged from a gate not far away.

Overhead the glow of the moon shed light into the alley and he could make out the woman who had spoken to him—who had, no doubt, listened to the talk of the drunkard. Her dark hair was odorous of musk, and her cheeks were sunken in too much upon the bones. Her eyes were shadows—she wore no veil—but her flesh was white, and her arms strong and supple.

"Is any one in the house with thee?" he asked curtly, and she shook her head.

"Nay, my lord, there is none. I have raisins and curried rice, and a rare repast, even for a man of note such as thou—"

"The horses?"

"A spear's length onward is the gate to the courtyard." She glanced fleetingly at the splendid stallion. "Come, my lord."

CHAPTER IV

THE NECKLACE

WHEN he had fed and rubbed down the two horses, Sir Hugh sought and found a flimsy stair that led to a balcony above the yard. He was sure that no one had watched him go in—in that street curiosity was not a virtue. The fat man was snoring where he sat down, and the gate had a stout bar within.

Crossing the balcony, he entered a small room, the windows hung with red silk behind the lattice. A bronze lamp reflected its light from a painted ceiling, and a divan was nearly shrouded with soiled samite. Sir Hugh thought that if the light were brighter, the room would have seemed more dirty.

"Allah bring thee joy!" The woman

saluted him and offered to take the massive sword.

"Nay, let be!" He flung himself down on a bench from which he could watch the arched entrance to the inner passage, and ordered her to bring whatever she had of food.

While he satisfied his hunger she curled up on the divan and watched him, henna-stained fingers clasped under her chin.

"That is a strange sword."

"Too heavy for thy hand."

"Thou hast the speech of a Beduin, and the bearing of—of a *mir*, a leader of men."

Sir Hugh pushed away the tabouret and considered her, reading little in her face save that she had been more beautiful than now and might have been Armenian or Georgian by birth—perhaps a slave carried off in childhood who had become a creature of the Muhammadans.

"I will lodge here this night."

She made a little gesture of acknowledgment, touching brow and lips and breast.

"The pleasure of my lord hath brought honor to his slave. Art thou a warrior of Ind? It is said in the bazaar that Muhammad Shah hath brought with him many such."

"Nay, I am—" the crusader's eyes smiled—"from Palestine."

"*Ai*, a weary way." She slipped from the couch and stood behind him, running her fingers lightly through the mass of his yellow hair. "Will my lord the warrior have wine, unless—"

"Wine I will have. Why—" Sir Hugh thought of the philosophy of the stout reveler—"should the prophet forbid it in this world, or the houris of Paradise? Thy name?"

Taking down a jar that hung by the window lattice, she filled a copper cup, drinking first to reassure her guest.

"I am Salma, the Georgian."

Her eyes, darkened with *kohl*, had taken measure of the wallet in his belt, and the measure was satisfactory. But hanging from the belt she noticed a length of necklace, of opals and ear pendants, and a withered human nose.

"And thy price for the lodging, O Salma?"

If this was a night of festival, he was safer in the Georgian's house than in any *khan* or *serai* where he would meet throngs of Kharesmians. And before going forth he had many things to find out.

But the woman stepped back, her hands against her breast. "Nay—my lord, I did not know. Surely the sower of destruction pays no price. I have heard—wert thou sent? Has an order been given?"

"Who would give an order, to me?" Sir Hugh had caught the new note of fear in her voice. "I came. Is not that enough?"

She seemed more intent on reading his face than in weighing his words, and some instinct reassured her, so that she smiled and settled back on the divan, curling her bare feet under her comfortably.

"I have heard thou art a man of strange moods. When the grandees of the Lion of Islam entered the *suk al maidan* before the sunset hour of prayer, I heard tell thou didst linger behind to watch the road."

Sir Hugh laughed and this seemed to puzzle her.

"Perhaps thou hast heard my name, O daughter of Rai."

"Nay, but thou art known in all Kharesmia from the sea to Ind." She nodded at the long sword that stood against his chair. "Surely that is the blade of the sower of destruction, the dispenser of fate, the executioner of the Shah who takes life from those who have displeased him. And that is the necklace thou hast fashioned of women's trinkets."

Taking it from his belt, the crusader tossed it upon the tabouret, repressing a shiver of disgust. So Mir Beg had gained his trophy in this way. And the slave girl had taken him for Mir Beg. No harm for her to think that, for a while. He had a use for the necklace.

Abruptly, he looked up, and tried to speak casually.

"Is it true that the Lion of Islam, the exalted, the world-defying Shah of shahs

arrived in the city this day? With the Amir Omar?"

"Aye, my lord. I watched from the roof and saw his white camel and the emerald crest of his turban. Before now the Shah had not honored us with the presence. The *imams* and the nobles have made a feast for him."

Then Sir Hugh knew why throngs had entered the gates of Rai, and why the city was awake and rejoicing. The man he had seen in the pavilion at the caravanserai was the emperor of Kharesmia, who chose to travel, it seemed, in haste and nameless across the salt desert. In such haste that his minister, the Amir Omar, had slain Khalil and sought the crusader's life for the gain of four fresh horses.

This emperor, Muhammad Shah, had never visited Rai before. And yet he had journeyed hither in spite of thirst and privation, and the lives of men and beasts. Now there was a festival in Rai—

Sir Hugh pondered, weighing one thing against another, and wondering how much Salma could be trusted. Given gold, he thought, she would serve him for a while.

"Where is the court of the Shah?" he asked.

"Where, but in the *tarim*, beyond the markets? The *imams* and the nobles go thither to make the salaam of greeting, for his coming was not known to them, and they fear that blame will fall upon them. The Shah is not a man of mercy."

"Nor am I."

Salma shivered a little, because the eyes of her guest were bleak and gray as the steel of the sword that he kept ever near to his hand.

"Go to the court, O daughter of Rai, and carry a message. Say to no one that Mir Beg is in this street." He opened his wallet and drew out two gold *dinars*. "This is thy reward for silence. Find an astrologer named Nureddin who is in the following of the Shah—a mountebank with a curling beard. Say that one in thy house would speak with him."

"I shall say 'By command of Mir Beg' and he will surely come."

"Nay, thou wilt say, 'By token of the Archer and the Dragon.' "

"The Archer and the Dragon," she repeated, rising and picking up a veil, with a last glance at the gold pieces. " 'Tis a strange token."

Sir Hugh smiled, and the lines around his wide lips softened.

"No stranger than the nature of man, who will flee from the thing he fears and distrust the promise of reward, but is ever drawn by curiosity."

When she had gone, he sat patiently, the long blade of Durandal across his knees, listening to the sounds of the street—a far-off voice crying the first hour of the morning and a chorus of revelers that mocked the watchman; the slip-slap of furtive feet stealing away, broken by the harsh oaths of a sudden quarrel.

He heard a woman in the next house laugh shrilly, until another screamed and there fell a silence, as if the ears of all the street were harkening. If it were known outside the room in which he sat that he was no follower of the Shah but a Nazarene, he would never leave the street alive.

Khalil would have relished the adventure—would have given him wise counsel. The Arab had said often that it was better to go ahead than to hang back, better to go unseen and unlooked-for, and to strike swiftly.

And that was what Sir Hugh meant to do.

WITH hesitating step Nureddin climbed the outer stair and, instead of entering the chamber, thrust his black sugar loaf hat and his shaggy head through the curtains. When he saw the crusader he blinked like an owl, his beard quivered and he slipped into the room, drawing the curtains behind him carefully. The woman slipped past him and caught up the gold pieces; then, as the crusader did not reprove her, she went and curled up on the divan.

"By the breath of Ali—by the ninety and nine holy names!" whispered the

astrologer. "Why art thou here? If it were seen—if I were seen in this place, we would be given to the elephants. What is this Georgian? She will betray us—"

"She will not speak the name of Mir Beg." Sir Hugh nodded at the table. "She has seen the necklace, and the sword, and it is known to her that I am the Shah's executioner."

Nureddin bent over the jewels of Mir Beg, his fingers twitching in his beard. His plump lips opened and shut wordlessly. "Thou hast slain—" he muttered suddenly, and was silent. Then he sat down on his heels and meditated, visibly waxing curious.

"Why didst thou send for me?" he asked at length.

"To tell me why Khalil the Beduin was put to death."

The astrologer spread out his hands, looked at Sir Hugh, and shook his head.

"*Ya aba shah al-khayr*," he vouchsafed. "By command of my lord the emperor. He saw the two chargers in the caravanserai, and gave an order that they should be taken."

"But the Shah's name was not spoken—Khalil knew it not."

"And am I to know the thoughts of the Lion of Islam? He chose to hide his name, and it would not have mattered in any case. The Arab was a hot-headed fool—" Nureddin glanced again at the crusader's impassive eyes. "Yet a most generous chieftain, a brave man, though he took too little account of omens. There had been a sign in the sky that one should die that night. It would not have happened otherwise."

He began to feel comfortable. After all, he did not think the Nazarene had any quarrel with him, and the warrior's wallet held gold. Nureddin had been sent for and some of the gold would pass into his hand. Afterward, he could denounce the stranger and establish his own innocence and gain business on the strength of it all.

"Why did the Shah covet the horses?" asked Sir Hugh quietly. "He had a racing camel under him."

"The camel was a little lame, and the Lord of lords desired to have fast horses ready to hand in case of need. He—he had departed from the cities on the far side of the salt desert to hunt antelope. Then he decided to visit Rai and the mountain kingdoms of his empire; but the heat in the barrens was beyond enduring, so he hastened to escape the *ghils* and the storms of that accursed place."

"And did he conceal his name," Sir Hugh put in, "to make greater haste? That was a lie. Should not Mir Beg, the sword-arm of the *Shah-im-shah*, know the reason of his coming and setting forth?"

Nureddin bethought him then of the listening woman and was troubled. He could read men's eyes—because he was too clever to depend altogether upon the aspect of the stars in casting fortunes.

"What can I tell thee that is unknown to thee?"

"This: Muhammad Shah fled across the desert. He was in fear of pursuit, so he hid his name and hastened. He left men in the foothills to watch the trail. What did he fear?"

"The *ghils*, the spirits of the unburied dead, the riders of the barren lands!"

The whisper of the astrologer was heavy with dread, and for a moment the memory of the crusader went back to the multitude of horsemen he had seen far below him at sunset. Into his mind pressed old stories and age-old fears—werewolves that preyed upon men, and those other foes, the legions of Anti-Christ that were penned up at the far end of the earth, the land of Gog and Magog whence they would issue forth at Satan's bidding.

Angrily, he cleared these fancies from a weary brain, and struck his clenched fist on the flat of the sword.

"The truth!" he cried. "Enough of lies. I will have the truth from thee, or never another word wilt thou utter."

Nureddin shivered, crouching on the floor, clutching at beard and cheeks.

"Nay, my lord—nay, prince and commander of men, I will tell thee the tale, all of it. And yet if they who pursue

the Shah be not *ghils* they are more than mortals.

"They are indeed spirits," the astrologer went on earnestly, "because the wind bears them hither and thither at night; they disappear and take shape at will. They ride horses that carry them at a gallop over the highest mountain passes.

"Verily until now they have been penned behind the mountains that we call the *Taghdumbash*, the Roof of the World. Your emperor Iskander made conquests of all the lands until he came to the eaves of the Roof of the World, and I have heard tell that the Roumis* once ruled all of the earth except the deserts beyond—" Nureddin stabbed with a thin forefinger toward the east—"beyond the mountains where the sun rises, the limbo of the earth, the place called Cathay."

Sir Hugh made a gesture of assent. Minstrels and home-returning wanderers had chanted songs of Cathay, its magicians and its wild horsemen. In his childhood he had been told of the wonderful country of Prester John of Asia.

"Aforetime," went on the astrologer, "Muhammad Shah was the greatest of earth's rulers. As he waxed in power, it was his whim to slay and torture men. Some he did to death by the kneeling of elephants, some by casting from towers, some by poisons. Why not? He is the shield of Islam.

"And then misfortune came upon his head in this wise. Envoys had journeyed to him from an unknown chieftain, a nomad, a lord of desert land, and it seemed to the Shah that these envoys were spies. So he cut off the head of one, and the beards of the others, sending them back to Cathay whence they had come, to the chieftain who called himself Khan of Cathay, and who is called a Mongol by others.

"*Wallahi*—I am a man of peace! Of war and its waging I know nothing. At that time I was in Samarkand, the city of the Shah. They said then that the Khan of Cathay was moving out of his deserts to avenge the death of the envoy. Why should war happen for a little thing like that?

"The Shah also lifted the standard and mustered his host and I saw many multitudes of armed riders, of elephants with leather coats, and slaves. There was a battle under the Roof of the World and before long the Shah returned hastily to Samarkand, giving out praise and robes of honor but hurrying south. His army was not with him.

"From Samarkand he carried his household—" by this Nureddin meant his family and wives and slaves—"and his treasure of precious stones. The walls of Samarkand were mighty but the Shah went away very quickly and I joined his following because there was talk that the host of Cathay marched upon Samarkand. Many of the warriors said that desert horsemen could not storm a walled city—still, I did not linger, and this was well. Within two moons, when we were in the gardens of Khorassan, we heard that Samarkand had yielded to the hordes of Cathay.

"Then the Shah ceased to gather a new army and began to journey to the west, to Nisapur, on the caravan road. It was then the time of grape gathering, and some Turkomans who rode swift camels gave out a report that the Khan of the Cathayans—"

He hesitated, looking uneasily about.

"The Khan hath sent forth chosen riders to hunt down the Shah."

Sir Hugh had listened closely, and questioned this:

"To ride down an emperor in his own domain? That is idle talk. If so, an army must have been sent, and an army must e'en stop to besiege cities and gather supplies."

"As to that I know not. But this I know. Muhammad Shah made pretense of enjoying a hunt at Nisapur; secretly he set forth with his officers and treasure to cross the salt desert. That also was to come upon my head. It was time to leave the Shah—I rode ahead. By the Ka'aba, I have ridden a thousand leagues

*The Romans.

since the grass turned green. My bones have ached. But this is a rich city, and at peace."

"And here he will gather a new host," meditated the crusader aloud.

"Am I a man of weapons and blood, to say thus and so is the case? What happened to the warriors in Kharesmia beyond the desert? They were scattered like old leaves when the hot wind blows. They fed the kites." Nureddin stroked his plump thighs and shook his head.

"So the Cathayans are magicians?"

"The Cathayans are magicians. Yet few ride with this accursed host of Mongol warriors. But the wizards make their arrows fly vast distances, always striking the mark. They can see at night, and they listen to messages that the wind carries. It is good that they are on the other side of the salt desert."

Sir Hugh half smiled.

"This was not known in Rai until the coming of Muhammad Shah?"

"It is not known yet. The Shah hath summoned the *imams* to his *divan*." *

"Come!"

The crusader stood up, and emptied half the coins from his wallet upon the tabouret, saying to the Georgian girl that this was for the feeding and care of the horses, in case he did not return. To Nureddin, who was watching with jealous eyes, he added—

"We will go to this council of the Shah, thou and I."

Nureddin's beard fairly curled and he choked when he tried to speak.

"To the council—among Turkoman chieftains and other devils. May Allah assuage thy madness!"

"Thy part is no more than to gain me entrance to the presence of this lord." Sir Hugh knotted up his wallet and tossed it to the astrologer who caught it skilfully in spite of his agitation. "Thy pay. Come, time lacks and before this Shah and his minister I must proclaim them guilty of a foul wrong, and an ill deed."

"*Ail*"

*Council.

But a hand of steel closed upon the arm of the terrified savant, lifting him from the floor and propelling him into the outer darkness. There Sir Hugh paused to don mail hauberk and thigh pieces and to draw the steel mesh of the hood over his head. He had given away the last of his gold. His horse Kutb was fed and cared for; he himself would stand before Muhammad Shah, and from that presence there was no way of escape. Within the hour Sir Hugh thought that he would be beyond need of gold.

And a resonant tongue was heard in the street without:

"See! The dawn breaks and rends night's canopy;
Arise, and drain a morning draught with me!
Away with gloom! full many a dawn will break
Looking for us, and we not here to see!"

The disciple of Omar, aroused by the stir in the courtyard, staggered to his feet, wound up his girdle and went none too steadily about his business.

CHAPTER V

THE CHALLENGE

NUREDDIN had time to reflect as they walked through the almost deserted streets, and reflection brought comfort. Mad or not, the Nazarene meant to go alone into the presence of the Muhammadan lords, and that would be the end of him. And Nureddin could say that he had tricked the stranger and delivered him up to punishment.

No one stopped them, because Rai was beginning to fall asleep after its merry-making. The great square before the mosque and the governor's house, in which Muhammad had quartered himself, was dark except for the dull glow of the low-hanging moon.

A watchman cried the third hour of the morning as they entered the garden of the *tarim*. Here and in the courtyard lay warriors of the Shah's following, in the utter sleep of weariness.

Persian spearmen, wearing plumed helmets and light, gilded scale armor, halted

them in the hall. They had seen Nureddin coming and going and when the astrologer explained that the tall warrior brought tidings to the Shah the spearmen suffered them to pass.

"The Shah does not sleep," Nureddin whispered. "He sits with the grandees and chieftains and officers on the roof."

But Nureddin's knees began to quiver as they climbed a marble stair and when two men with drawn swords appeared at the head of the stair, he hung back.

"These be Turkomans," he cried under his breath. "Dogs with long fangs. Let us go away!"

"Go, then," responded the crusader and mounted the last steps slowly, his sheathed sword in his left hand. Although his pulse raced and his teeth were set, he managed to seem quite at ease, and the guards waited for him to speak.

They were lean and alert, and their long simitars looked more than serviceable; but they wore baggy velvet breeches and loose embroidered tunics, and Sir Hugh did not think they had been with the caravan. They understood no Arabic, so he spoke the word that has one meaning in all Asia.

"*Padishah!*"

At this request to be admitted to the emperor, the sentries frowned; but the mien of the visitor was determined, his stride resolute, and they had never seen any one quite like him before. Weapon in hand, they lifted the silk curtain in a sandalwood screen and accompanied Sir Hugh into the presence of the first lord of Islam.

Verily Muhammad sat with his officers and grandees, but the crusader, who had expected to find him deep in council, halted utterly surprized.

For a moment there was silence—except that a drum in the shadows muttered rhythmically and a flute piped softly.

Cross-legged on a carpet sat Muhammad, one hand extended toward an ivory box at his side. In the box was *hashish*, and the eyes of the Shah were moist and dulled. Against the parapet of the clay roof sat some scores of Muhammadans in their finest *khalats*, watching intently the motions of a dancing boy—a *batcha*, who, with rice-powdered cheeks and blackened brows, knelt before Muhammad, lithe bare arms twining and twisting over his head.

So wrapped up in the dance were the spectators—who patted their hands together gently in time to the jingling of a tambourine—that no one had eyes to spare for the unexpected visitor.

Some murmured their delight, others, sipping wine and *sumvar*, were trying to attract the attention of the singing girls who sat on the soles of their feet in a corner by the musicians, making great play with transparent veils in henna-stained fingers.

Omar the Amir was the first to perceive Sir Hugh. The moonlight was dim and the glow from the burning incense beside the *batcha* created more shadow than light, but Omar had learned to look into shadows and now he dared interrupt the amusement of his master.

"By Allah, what is this?"

The boy ceased gesturing, the singing girls drew closer their veils, the musicians dropped their hands, and a hundred faces turned toward the hooded figure in chain mail.

Sir Hugh himself made answer, seizing the instant for speech—

"A Nazarene, a peer of Christendom, who bears a message to the emperor of Kharesmia."

Muhammad's sluggish memory stirred, and he recognized the solitary rider who had defied him in the caravanserai. He saw that the Turkoman guards had half-raised their weapons, and that his officers were thronging to their feet. He perceived no reason for alarm; but he was angry that his quiet had been disturbed; moreover—for hashish breeds indolence—he was drowsy.

"What is thy name?" he asked.

"Hugh, knight of Taranto, vassal of Baldwin, a king of Frankistan."

"Thy message, dog of a Nazarene?" barked Omar, for unless the stranger were

touched by Allah, only a matter of life itself would bring him before the Kharesmians.

Sir Hugh stepped back so that the two guards were in front of him and felt with his free hand in his girdle.

"I have come, O *Padishah*, to accuse thee in the presence of thine officers of a foul and traitorous murder. By thy command was slain the Arab chieftain Khalil, who was guiltless of wrong or affront to thee."

The listeners remained rigid in utter astonishment. Surely the Nazarene was mad!

"For that," resumed the deep voice of the knight, "thou art emperor of a wide domain and may not take weapon in hand to justify thyself, I do challenge thee to name a champion. With him, on horse or afoot, with lance, sword or ax, I will do battle this night, and by slaying him will make manifest thy guilt to all men. For God defends a just quarrel."

Those who understood the sonorous Arabic whispered to the others and there was a stir among the chieftains of the Shah, for the Kharesmians were a warlike people. But annoyance overspread Muhammad's petulant face, and he made a sign to Omar.

Sir Hugh, seeing the Shah clearly in the glow of the incense bowl, spoke again swiftly:

"My lord, hold back thy men! If they come against me not one but many will fall this night. And if I fall, the tidings that I bring from the salt desert will never reach thee."

The plump lips of Muhammad moved and he stretched out his hand toward the jeweled simitar that lay across the arm of his sword-bearer.

"Allah hath touched thee for thy sins—dog of a Nazarene. What word hast thou?"

"By this token—" Sir Hugh tossed the thing he held in his right hand upon the carpet at the Shah's knees—"from the body of Mir Beg, I have seen thine enemies, the riders of Cathay."

Omar stooped and picked up the necklace of Mir Beg, scrutinizing the women's baubles and the withered nose.

"*Ma'ashallah!* Thou hast slain the sower of destruction. What hast thou seen?"

Sir Hugh's right hand gripped the hilt of Durandal, and his left hand tore the sheath from the long bright blade.

"I saw thy pursuers, speeding hither from the salt plain. And at dusk, when I turned aside from the road into the fields, I saw the glint of spear tips against the dark forest line. Horsemen are stealing like wolves upon thy city."

Shaken somewhat by the evidence of Mir Beg's death and reluctant to have swords drawn in the presence of his master, Omar hesitated until reflection brought him reassurance.

"*Yah ahmak!* O madman, thy body shall be given to the dogs for burial—"

But the Shah's lips grew pallid, as his brain came out from the influence of the drug.

"Question him—torture him—find out the truth," he whispered.

"O my Sultan, the Cathayans could not cross the desert so swiftly. The unbeliever hath heard the talk of thy caravaneers and, as for torturing him, I do not think we can take him alive. If it please thee to withdraw, we will send his soul to the court of Satan."

It did not occur to them that Sir Hugh was not skilled at lying—that he had risked everything to defy them and settle the quarrel in his own way, the only way open to one who had taken the rigid vows of knighthood—that he had done only what he knew in his heart Khalil would have done for him had the Arab survived and he himself been slain.

Searching the faces turned toward him, the crusader beheld only cruelty and the lust to kill in the narrowed eyes, the thin, snarling lips, the fingers that caught at dagger hilt and sword girdle. And suddenly he leaped aside, into an angle of the parapet where none could come at him from behind.

Wavering between apprehension and

eagerness to watch the downfall of the Nazarene, Muhammad decided that it would be amusing to have the mad stranger cut down in his presence.

"Slay!" he cried, and the throng moved in upon Sir Hugh.

"Are ye dogs to hunt in packs!" the crusader taunted them. "Is there not one without fear—or is God to be judge between me and ye? Come, and taste of Durandal that hath laid low the heads of kings, and the knighthood of the Moors. Come—the sword of Roland is lifted again!"

Hard breathing, cautious of foot, they crept forward, simitars grating from scabbards.

And then rang out the voice of the watchman in the square below.

"Ho Moslems, arise and arm! Arise and arm!"

The shuffling of feet ceased, and men held their breath to listen. On the other side of the town brazen cymbals clashed and clanged.

Omar stepped to the parapet beyond Sir Hugh and searched the shadowy city with his eyes.

"A village burns yonder, to the east," he said.

A horse galloped past the *tarim*, and somewhere a murmur sprang into being. And then straining ears caught the distant clash of steel. The nobles who had taken their stand near the Shah, turned to him expectantly. And Muhammad's arrogance and pride vanished as suddenly as tinder caught by flame.

"The Cathayans!"

Omar came to his side.

"My sultan, they can not be here. Some pillagers—"

But Muhammad Shah, the Lion of Islam, was in the grip of overmastering fear. Thrusting aside those who stood in his path he cried over his shoulder for his amirs and guards to attend him. Then he departed down a stairway, and the disturbed Kharesmians hastened after him.

Only the Turkomans and some slaves remained confronting Sir Hugh, and these were not eager to close with the mailed figure that loomed by the parapet. One of them remembered the necklace and ran to snatch it up and the others retreated to the nearest stair where they could watch the Nazarene and look below at the same time.

Sir Hugh sat down on the parapet and listened. He did not venture to take his eyes from the Muhammadans. The distant murmur had resolved itself into shouting. Nearer at hand drums rolled suddenly, and were answered by other drums, and still others beyond the city. Sir Hugh had never heard that strident, carrying note before.

The streets behind him seemed to be alive with hurrying horses. He glanced at the Turkomans and looked quickly over his shoulder.

The moon was setting and there was a gray streak along the eastern skyline. In this half darkness before the dawn he beheld, sitting a motionless horse in the square by the governor's house, a solitary rider. Faintly gleamed upon the horseman's head a helmet and behind his shoulder a lance tip.

SIR HUGH turned back to the half score Muhammadans who lurked upon the roof like uneasy jackals. He could not depart down one of the stairs while these worthies remained with their javelins and long knives—and it was useless to think of following the Shah for the present.

Again the strange drums barked, and again came the answer, nearer now. A sudden bustle arose in the courtyard beneath—hurrying feet, the sharp twang of bows and the outcry of stricken men.

The Turkomans and slaves had been peering down the main stair. Now they turned and fled after their master, silently.

Sir Hugh bent over the parapet, straining eyes and ears. The white bole of a minaret was visible in the murk and upon its balcony a light gleamed, rising and falling, as if signaling to the shadow-filled city. The sky grew lighter, but no muezzin cried out the sonorous call to prayer.

Invisible in the maw of the alleys, horses still galloped past the house, the *thud-thud* of hoofs growing louder and louder. The changed aspect of the city, the sounds of an invisible multitude—all this savored of magic.

"*Ai*—prince of swordsmen, mighty Nazarene! Aid, or I perish!"

Panting, his short legs flying over the roof tiles, Nureddin shot through the curtained entrance of the screen and cast himself down by the crusader. Behind him two strange warriors appeared.

They were little taller than the astrologer. Clad in dark leather and wolfskin cloaks and soft boots that made no sound on the tiles, they darted like ferrets on their prey.

"Back!" cried Sir Hugh, lifting his sword.

Seeing him they separated and closed in from opposite sides without a word. One of them slashed at his arm with a short saber curved like a sickle and broad at the tip—half ax, half sword. The crusader parried, setting his feet, and lunged full at the other.

The long blade caught the man beneath the heart and passed through his body. Wrenching his sword clear, Sir Hugh stepped quickly to one side as the first foeman came at him. He took the stroke of the saber on the hand guard of Durandal, and stepped back.

"Yield thee!" he said again, but the warrior paid no heed though he must have understood voice and gesture. Crouching, he ran forward and the downstroke of the crusader's blade caught him at the base of the neck, severing his head and right shoulder from his body.

"Allah give thee strength," moaned Nureddin. "Look, here are others."

Two warriors came through the curtain —a quick-striding man in breastplate and helmet with a long horsehair plume, and an archer, broad of shoulder and bare of head. The bowman plucked a two-foot shaft from the quiver at his hip and loosed it at the astrologer.

The bow was as thick as Sir Hugh's wrist, and the arms that drew it were massive with mighty sinew. Nureddin rolled over and the arrow passed only through his robe under the armpit, pinning him to the parapet. By the shock with which it met the sun-baked clay, the crusader knew that another shaft could penetrate his loose chain mail.

The archer, ten paces distant, fitted a fresh arrow to his bow, and glanced at Sir Hugh. Apparently the sight of the tall warrior surprized him, because he exchanged a low word with his companion who seemed to be an officer, and the man with the crested helmet called out sharply.

Immediately, the screen with its curtain was cast down. Sir Hugh was aware of figures ascending the stair and flooding the roof. Some one gave an order, and the taut muscles of the bowman's arm slackened.

"Cathayans!" cried Nureddin. "Already have I died. My heart is water and I must die again."

But the weary and tight-lipped crusader, facing a throng of strange foemen, was looking into the eyes of a man of his own height—a majestic figure robed in blue silk, his bare throat encircled by a chain of pure jade stones, his black nankeen cap surmounted by towering peacock plumes. A thin beard swept his broad chest, and his wide, full eyes were those of a sage and a dreamer.

"Where is the *padishah?*" the stranger asked, his deep voice pronouncing the Arabic syllables slowly.

To Nureddin it seemed quite natural that a wizard from Cathay should speak in tongues, and he hoped with all his heart that the Nazarene would propitiate the tall lord.

"I know not," Sir Hugh made answer.

The bearded Cathayan swept the roof with an understanding glance.

"He was here."

"Within the hour. He went with his followers."

For a moment the Cathayan considered the crusader.

"Thy speech is not the speech of the

other *Tu-kuie.* Thou art a barbarian from another land—to the west?"

His calmess brought inspiration to the despairing Nureddin.

"O exalted one—O lord of created things—this, my companion, is a foe of the emperor. Hither came he to give challenge to the Shah. And I am his friend, his brother. I am a traveler and a man of experience, and I will serve thee well and faithfully. We meant no harm to thy men, who rushed upon this warrior heedlessly. His sword hath a sigil writ upon it, and it deals death when it strikes."

The bearded noble glanced at the bodies of the warriors and sighed; then he looked at Sir Hugh questioningly.

"I will not yield me to unnamed foes," said the crusader quietly. "Magician or no, I bid thee make an end."

"Aye," murmured the Cathayan, "thou art a barbarian, blunt and bold and foolish. The Eagle would wish to see thee, and thy weapon. Wipe and sheath it."

Sir Hugh made no move to do so, and the stranger seemed to read his thought.

"I am Ye Lui Kutsai," he said, "prince of Shantung, of the Golden Dynasty of Cathay."

"Leader of these men?"

Kutsai shook his head, and stretched out a wide-sleeved arm toward the red glow of the sunrise.

"Servant—as thou wilt be—of the great Khan, Genghis, who is master of Cathay, and of all the earth from here to there. Keep thy sword. What would it avail thee against us? Come to my *yamen* when I send for thee."

Sir Hugh's set face relaxed, and when one of the warriors brought him his leather scabbard, he sheathed the blade of Durandal. Then he bent down to free Nureddin from the arrow. But the astrologer was staring open mouthed beyond him.

"O Nazarene," he croaked, "it has happened, even as I foretold. Look, here are the signs that were to be revealed to thee! Thy fortune is assured—remember that I foretold it."

Puzzled by the earnestness of the little man, the crusader glanced behind him. The warrior who had handed him his scabbard—the same who had loosed the arrow at Nureddin—was now slipping the string from his heavy bow of black wood and ivory.

"The Archer," chattered Nureddin. "And on the robe of the magician—"

The silk tunic of the Cathayan bore, embroidered in gold, the writhing semblance of a dragon.

CHAPTER VI

BEHIND THE HORDE

SIR HUGH was roused from deep sleep by a hard grip on his shoulder. The sun was nearly overhead, and the rug upon which he lay outstretched, in the spot where the Shah had rested, fairly simmered on the hot tiles. The officer of the horsehair crest, having wakened him, motioned for the crusader to descend the stair.

"Now is the *sa'at,* the hour of commencement of happenings," observed Nureddin who had come to heel faithfully. "Will they torture us? *Ai,* it is not good to be in the hands of wizards!"

Sir Hugh noticed that the rent in the astrologer's black robe had been neatly sewn up.

"Did the arrow wound thee, little man?"

At this Nureddin seemed confused.

"Nay, lord—it glanced from a—a purse that was slung beneath my shoulder."

He inspected his robe carefully, glancing up timidly as a bird that sees a stranger approaching its nest.

"No more than a few worthless trinkets," he added, although his companion only smiled.

They were escorted into the wide hall, where the bodies of the Persian spearmen lay thrust into a corner. Sir Hugh thought they had been slain with arrows and the shafts pulled out afterward. In the hall sat Kutsai behind a sandalwood

table, his arms folded in his sleeves. At either end of the table two slender Cathayans wrote with tiny brushes upon rolls of rice paper.

Before the prince stood harrassed Muhammadans, acting as interpreters while captives were brought to the table and questioned. Sir Hugh inspected the warriors on guard at the door, with a soldier's eye for detail of bearing and equipment.

Stalwart men he thought, road weary—horsemen beyond doubt. All carried two bows in a wooden or leather case slung at one hip; their broad, curved scabbards hung between their shoulder blades on a strap passed around the neck and secured over the chest armor—boiled leather coated with lacquer.

Except for the leather drop, studded with iron rings, that protected the nape of the neck, they wore no armor on the back. Nor were they supplied with shields.

Light cavalry, the crusader thought, armed for offense rather than defense. A foison of spears—the mailed horsemen of Christiandom—would shatter such an array. But the broad, sun-browned faces, the muscular throats and hands bespoke endurance and the bows were certainly heavy. He thought, too, that the warriors seemed to be of a different race than Kutsai's attendants.

"They are Mongols," Nureddin whispered an answer to his question. "Genghis Khan is the chief of the Mongols. He conquered Cathay, and these magicians are conquering all the other lands for him. Look, they make spells with birds and tablets of brass and writings. Aye, the Mongols came out of their desert, but now they have made themselves masters of Cathay and the twain are as one. The Horde is one—and greatly to be feared."

The birds were pigeons, dozens of them, penned in little bamboo cages. Kutsai gave an order and a servant took one of the pigeons from its cage, first reading carefully an inscription painted on the bamboo.

Swiftly the Cathayan prince took a tiny square of rice paper from a secretary, read it over and rolled it up, thrusting the scroll into a silver tube clamped to the bird's claw. Then he nodded to the servant, who went to the door and cast the pigeon up into the air, watching for a moment before returning to his duties.

"It flew east," Sir Hugh commented. "Aye, a messenger pigeon."

No witchcraft in that! But the circular brass sheet puzzled him. A Cathayan hovered over it, steel-tipped stylus in hand. At intervals he carried it to Kutsai who, after cross-questioning the most intelligent of his captives, the *imams* and *mullahs* of the city, pointed out a spot on the brass, and he of the stylus made a mark and inscription.

More than half the sheet, Sir Hugh noticed, was covered with these marks—wavering lines and squares that looked like houses and triangles that might be tents. Finally he understood.

Long ago, when he had struggled with his letters under the tuition of a priest, he had been shown a parchment bearing such lines. These were rivers, the squares were cities, the rows of triangles mountains and the brass sheet was a map—a map that grew under the Cathayan's direction.

"No magic this," he said, "but the arts of priests and scribes."

"Aye, but yonder are strange devices, I think, for judging the position of the stars."

Nureddin nudged his companion and pointed to a small and highly polished bronze globe ruled off in parallel circles. Beside this was a jade slab with a silver arm pointing up from it at right angles. Before the arm a square inset of some size was filled with water.*

"As to that I know not," Sir Hugh admitted.

Weapons and men who used them, and horses he could judge with an experienced eye. But these instruments were things undreamed of by the savants and astrologers of Europe. Nureddin, however,

* A simple quadrant, for figuring the sun's shadow, the water serving to keep the plane of its base level.

drew comfort from them, perceiving that they were devices for measuring the changing of the seasons by the sun's shadow.

"These Cathayans," he whispered, "be astronomers, who calculate the position of the sun and moon. Knowing that, they measure off the hours and the size of the earth's surface—they keep a calendar. I can do more than that, I fortell events, as thou hast—"

He broke off in confusion, perceiving that the Cathayan prince was listening. Kutsai spoke to a clerk, who bowed thrice and approached them, saying in broken Arabic that cooked food awaited them in the courtyard and it would be well to satisfy their hunger, as they would have to leave Rai at any moment.

"Whither?" Sir Hugh asked himself as they left the hall.

Scores of Mongol officers were seated around fires in the courtyard, fires tended by Muhammadan captives who boiled whole quarters of sheep in great copper pots. Nureddin, after watching the hungry warriors fearfully, approached a pot with Sir Hugh and cut himself off a generous portion of mutton with his dagger as the others did, saying nothing at all about religious scruples.

"Wine!" he whispered, nudging the crusader. "Allah send it be of Shiraz."

The captives were going about among the warriors filling lacquer bowls with a sizzling white liquid that they poured from goatskins held under their arms. Nureddin held out his bowl eagerly, but his face changed as he sniffed at the bubbling fluid.

"Milk," he mutterd and tasted it warily. "Pfaugh! Mare's milk—goat's—camel's!"

Sir Hugh found the milk fermented, strange to the palate but refreshing and he emptied his bowl without complaint, making a hearty repast of the mutton. Barely had he finished when a horseman plunged into the courtyard, scattering the cooks, and leaped down from a sobbing and sweat-soaked pony.

The rider, stumbling on stiffened legs, ran into the hall, holding outstretched a long silver tablet. Instead of armor he wore bands of heavy buckram around chest and loins and forehead, and he was caked with dust and sand from his deerskin boots to his bloodshot eyes.

Another moment and Kutsai appeared in the door, drawing on a linen cloak. He spoke briefly with the Mongol officers, and nodded to Sir Hugh.

"An order has come from the Eagle," he said in his measured voice. "I ride to join him. And of thee I have need."

"Then I am captive—to this Eagle?"

The Cathayan considered, as a philosopher weighs an axiom.

"Is a stag within the hunting lines a captive? Thou art within the power of the great Khan, since this dawn. Only the dead are free of the Mongol yoke—the living must serve, each in his own way."

He swept his long arm around the courtyard.

"From one of the nobles of Rai I have learned thy history—though the *Tu-kuie* believed thee mad. Thou art a Christian warrior from the *Ta tsin*, the western world. The seas and rivers and peoples toward the setting sun are known to thee, and I may have need of thy knowledge."

"Whither goest thou?"

"Where the Shah rides we follow."

Sir Hugh's gray eyes lighted.

"It likes me well."

Nureddin's ears had been pricked to catch every syllable, and now the astrologer leaped up gleefully.

"We will not be slain. *Ai-a*, I am most useful—a hound upon a scent. I know all about the Shah, and can interpret omens."

Gravely the Cathayan surveyed him.

"Jackals also play their part," he said cryptically.

"O prince of Cathay," said the crusader boldly, "in Rai I have a charger beyond others dear to me. By thy leave, I would seek him out."

"A steed of good blood, fair to see?"

"Aye, a gray *kohlani* with unclipped tail and mane."

"Then the Master of Herds will have found him. Come!"

Gathering up his cloak Kutsai strode into the public square where a high-wheeled cart awaited him—a light chariot to which four horses were hitched. Mongols were mounted on the outer horses of the span,

When the Cathayan stepped into the chariot, drums rolled near at hand, and presently a patrol of lances trotted around a corner—its officer saluting the prince and dividing his ten men, half before the chariot, half behind.

Thus escorted, the three were whirled through the alleys of Rai, meeting at times other patrols, but never a Muhammadan. Courtyard gates were closed, and window lattices drawn. Sir Hugh, who expected to come upon pillaging and disorder, saw only deserted streets and empty gates when they passed through the wall of Rai on the far side.

It seemed to him that the Mongols could not be a great force—only the indolence and overconfidence of the Kharesmians had enabled the invaders to slip inside the gates. If the wall had been manned, the gates closed, the Muhammadans need not have yielded to these light-armed nomads who lacked siege engines of any kind. If Muhammad, he thought, had dared make a stand against them, matters would have turned out otherwise.

Outside the gate they came upon something grim and altogether unexpected. Almost covered by crows and flapping vultures and furtive, snarling jackals, the bodies of hundreds of Persian warriors lay in heaps throughout the orange groves and gardens.

"*Wallahi!*" Nureddin shivered and clutched the rail of the swift moving chariot.

"The guards," Kutsai said to the crusader, "upon this side of the city surrendered to us when it was known that Muhammad had fled. They were slain."

Sir Hugh frowned, restraining an angry word. But the Cathayan seemed to read his thoughts.

"It is well to think, and think again before blaming," he remarked. "I am not a Mongol, yet I understand their code. These Irani were warriors; because of fear they threw down their weapons. When fear had left them they would have fought against us again. It is the order of the Khan to put to death all weaponmen who surrender. When a foe is brave enough to stand against us, then quarter is offered him, because such men may be trusted."

"A strange order," quoth Sir Hugh.

"It saved thee life." The Cathayan smiled. "As it did me, for I was faithful to the Golden Dynasty."

The crusader looked back at the white wall of Rai.

"The Persians lacked heart, it is true. Five hundred men-at-arms and archers could have held the city."

Kutsai's dark eyes were meditative.

"Once in Kambalu, in the imperial city of Cathay five hundred thousand men-at-arms failed to hold a wall five times the strength of that yonder. I saw it, for I was then an officer of Cathay."

"How could that be?"

"This astrologer would say 'twas done by magic. I say—otherwise. Look about thee and reflect."

They were passing at a gallop through an open stretch, thronged with Mongol patrols and Muhammadan merchants. Wheat, rice and dried dates were being brought in carts and piled in great heaps, while bellowing herds of oxen and flocks of sheep were counted and driven off to the far end of the field.

"Nourishment," said Kutsai briefly.

"There is gold in Rai," spoke up Nureddin tentatively, "and many wealthy grandees—"

"But no time to plunder."

"Muhammad has escaped—gone far away. And his treasure was sent ahead upon fresh camels."

The Cathayan looked twice at Nureddin.

"Aye, wisely he kept fast horses saddled behind his house. From the men of Rai I learned that he rode with a hundred nobles and followers through the north gate at the time we entered the *rigistan.*

Our wings sighted him just about here, but his horses were fresh, ours jaded. He fled toward the mountains at first. Then, out of sight of pursuit, he turned west. Our advance riders picked up one of his stragglers."

"He is safe." Nureddin wagged his head shrewdly. "At the end of the western road lies Bagdad, with the armed host of the caliphs."

"A long road." Kutsai seemed to be weighing the little man's words. "Have the stars foretold his arrival in Bagdad?"

But Nureddin, for once, held his tongue. The chariot halted beside a stone wall that served as a corral for a neighing and rearing mass of horseflesh. Some Mongols in sheepskins and leather breeches came out of the dust to salute the prince, and receive his orders. In a little while Sir Hugh shouted with exultation and held out his hand for Kutb's rein. The gray stallion, already saddled for the road, whinnied and thrust his soft muzzle against his master's throat.

"Well for thee," smiled Kutsai, "we came swiftly, for the horse had been groomed and fed for the next courier."

He himself mounted a powerful roan, and Nureddin was given a tough looking pony with a rolling eye. While their escort of some fifty archers was coming up, the herders handed them saddle-bags. Sir Hugh untied the thong and inspected the contents of his with some curiosity. One bag held rice and grapes and sun-dried mutton, with a small jug of the mare's milk. The other, that served for a feed sack, held grain for the horse.

A smaller wallet was thrust into his belt, and this contained wax and flint and steel, with a needle and whetstone.

"Equipment," observed the Cathayan who had been watching him. "There is no knowing where we will halt or when."

When the escort had changed saddles to fresh mounts, Kutsai lifted his hand, the herders raised a shrill cry that might have been warning or well-wishing, and the Mongols who took the lead trotted across the rice fields and leaped irrigation ditches until they came out on a broad clay road that ran between avenues of poplars toward the setting sun.

Then the horses were put to a gallop, the riders easing their weight in the stirrups and slinging their lances over their shoulders. Kutsai glanced over his right shoulder at the mountains they were leaving behind them.

"The order was to come to the Eagle," he said, "and *he* may be in Bagdad or beyond that snow peak before we reach him."

Nureddin, bouncing along uncomfortably in the dust at the rear, his long woolen shoe tips flapping in the wind, heard the words and muttered to himself as if he were cherishing a secret grievance known to no other soul.

NUREDDIN, relieved of the fear of death, was a different person from Nureddin about to die. He was jealous of Sir Hugh, because the Cathayan prince kept the crusader at his side, deep in conversation when the pace would permit it. Although he had been given a rolled-up bed quilt, he complained of saddle sores, and of the dust and lack of wine to slake his parched throat.

For all that he kept his eyes about him, noticing the caravan of camels lightly laden that they passed in the first few hours, and listening until he was certain that this was the first unit of the Mongol baggage train. From that—although a man of peace—he deduced correctly that they were drawing near the fighting forces. A second courier appeared on the Bagdad road, plying his whip and bending over his pony's neck when he beheld them.

Kutsai gave an order and the Mongols divided, drawing to the side of the road. One, on a restive horse, dismounted in the cleared space. The courier drawing nearer, held up a silver tablet—the Mongol on foot raised his hand, and the courier was in the warrior's saddle, gripping the reins in a sinewy hand. Flying past Kutsai he shouted a hoarse greeting.

"*Ahatou—noyon!*"

Again that night when they halted to cook supper and rest the horses where a

stone bridge spanned a stream, and a clump of willows screened them, a dispatch rider came along and commandeered a mount. This time Kutsai halted the man long enough to ask a few questions, and though Nureddin wandered over to them he could make nothing of the answers.

"A message to the Khan," the Cathayan explained. "The post to Samarkand."

It seemed to Nureddin that the world was topsy-turvy. Instead of the usual straggle of fruit venders, pilgrims and nobles' cavalcade on the Bagdad road, they encountered only scattered patrols of the invaders, driving in cattle. Somehow the silence and the unceasing activity that went on in the hours of darkness depressed the astrologer more than all the imagined terrors of actual war. He would have chosen rather to see bands of slaves driven along the road and any amount of blood shed—not his own.

So he carried his troubles to the crusader who sat by the fire munching raisins. The Cathayan was sleeping soundly beyond earshot.

"Eh," pronounced Nureddin, "we are brothers of misfortune."

Sir Hugh continued to look into the fire.

"Why do we not see any believers, any Muslimin? Surely they are not all martyred!"

"More likely fled."

"Then let us flee. I have thought of a way. These devils who carry messages all have a silver tablet with a falcon drawn on it. Let us go away secretly, and lie hidden until one comes along. Then, when he dismounts to take thy horse, slay him with that long sword and keep his *talsmin*. The accursed Mongols honor it more than my people do the Shah's ring."

Sir Hugh smiled at the thought of Nureddin ambushing a dispatch rider. As for trying to escape, he had satisfied himself that they had pickets out and that the sentries did not sleep.

"What of the omens, O watcher of the stars?" he asked gravely. "We have found the Archer and the Dragon."

Torn between professional pride and anxiety, Nureddin twisted the curls of his beard.

"True, and yet—and yet the omens may be of evil, not of good alone. I have been thinking."

He watched Sir Hugh thrust some more brush on the embers and draw his saddle cloth over his knees to sleep.

"Listen," he whispered. "I remember now. It was the moon before this, in the Shah's camp. There was talk, that I heard—a little. Certain amirs were sent ahead to Irak Adjem, to far Persia. Rokneddin rules there and he is the son of the Shah. He is fond of war."

Sir Hugh was listening attentively now.

"The Shah never meant to stay at Rai. The caravan with his goods went on, somewhither. By the beard and breath of Ali, I swear that he planned to hurry to Rokneddin, who can muster twenty thousand swords, if the caliphs move to his aid. And the caliphs will lift the standard of war against a foe of the true believers."

He abandoned his beard to gesture earnestly.

"We galloped far today. Another two days will bring us to the river and the hills of Savah. That is within Rokneddin's domain. These un-eyelashed Mongols have not enough men to stand before his swords. Anyway, they are cattle drivers and sheep stealers. They will flee like dead leaves before the *simúm* wind. But what will happen to us? It is time we took thought together, thou and I, and made a plan."

A sinewy hand closed upon the astrologer's thin knee, and gray eyes probed his face.

"Art certain of these tidings?"

"By the Ka'aba, by the holy bedsheet—"

"Enough. Think ye Muhammad and his son will stand against this folk?"

"They will stand and there will be a battle!"

Sir Hugh lay back and rolled the saddle

cloth tighter. "God send it be so! Then may I strike a blow against the Kharesmians. Now go and sleep, man of omens."

And Nureddin crept back to his quilt heartily cursing all men of weapons and the whole race of warriors, including crusaders of past ages and Christians still to be born.

CHAPTER VII

A TRAP IS SET

AS A swimmer exults who has long seen the shore in front of him and who—with the last remnant of his strength—grasps a rock beneath the surface of the water and rests, Muhammad Shah, King of kings, rejoiced when he rode into a long valley at the head of a hundred road-weary nobles and slaves.

Far as the eye could reach, even to the rolling hills on either hand, stretched pavilions and tents. They shone under a mild autumn sun, crimson *tophs* and white awnings. In the center of the camp uprose the green banners of the caliphs, to right and left were visible the glittering gold and silver standards of Iran, and Muhammad drew a long breath of satisfaction when he knew that the mailed cavalry of far Persia had assembled to meet him.

There had been rain in the uplands and he rode forward through lush grass that wavered under a fitful wind. The salt barrens, the torture of sand and thirst were behind him, and this was a smiling land—breeder of warriors and fine horses.

His eyes exulted savagely in the great camp, and the throngs of turbaned men in long *khalats*. When Rokneddin came out of the tents with a cavalcade on rearing, caparisoned steeds, Muhammad greeted his son with pride.

Straightway he permitted himself to be escorted to the pavilion prepared for him, feeling a glow of inward satisfaction when Persian amirs pushed forward to hold the reins of his charger and a robed chamberlain crouched on elbows and knees to receive his weight as he dismounted.

Cymbals clashed when he set foot to earth and bearded chieftains crowded to the edge of the carpet that had been rolled from the pavilion to his horse. They thrust out jeweled hilts of simitars to be touched as he passed.

"May thy shadow increase, Lord of Our Lives!"

"We are here at thy command, O Shield of the Faithful!"

Hurrying into the inner chamber where the great teak pole of the pavilion stood, the Shah dismissed all his courtiers, until his slaves could bathe and shave him and robe him in fresh satin and cloth-of-gold. Then, commanding two simitars to be brought and placed in his crimson girdle, he sent for Omar the minister.

Omar came, surprized to find his master alone and the chamber empty save for seven caskets of plain sandalwood, and a bundle done up in cotton.

"What is the strength of the host of Rokneddin?" demanded Muhammad at once.

"My Sultan, I have passed through the camp. The caliphs, favored of Allah, have come to aid thee with six thousand horse and half as many spear and bowmen; thy son, exalted above others, awaits thee with four thousand swords of Iran, tempered and keen of edge; four thousand armored cavalry of the amirs—the heart of the host—are quartered around thee and upon the hills are Turkoman bands without number."

"Ten thousand horse," Muhammad's eyes gleamed. "Seven regiments of foot, and as many tribesmen to hold the flanks." It was more than enough for his purpose.

He stretched forth a plump hand, the fingers stiff with many rings, to the minister who had served him faithfully since he had been a child, slave-born, and who had guided him through massacre and battle to the highest dignity of a Muslim prince, the Throne of Gold.

"Well hast thou served me, O foster brother—and now I have a task for thee alone."

Omar, gaunt and anxious, knelt before

the Shah and touched his master's hand to his forehead—unquestioning, though the minister was of the finest lineage of ancient Iran, and the monarch indolent and unlettered.

"What is in these chests?" demanded Muhammad suddenly, a shadow of suspicion flitting across his broad face.

"My Sultan, I do not know."

Satisfied, the Shah took a small key from his girdle and unlocked the steel-bound lid. Summoning Omar to his side he opened it half way. Under his hand gleamed softly strings of pearls and lumps of blue turquoise, flaming emeralds, and yellow diamonds that seemed even in the dull light of the pavilion to be incarnate with hidden fire.

"Rubies of Badakshan, unflawed," Muhammad commented, "and the diamonds that were the ransom of the rajahs of Ind. The other coffers are not less in worth. They hold the greater part of the treasure of the Throne."

"But the pack animals—thy burden bearers still stand with their loads."

"Aye, and my slaves toss silver to the common warriors."

"They say in the camp that thy treasure is in those packs."

"*Inshallah!* Here is the wealth of Kharesmia. Do thou take a dozen followers, load these chests upon camels and bear them elsewhere. Be thou guardian of the treasure!"

Omar's lined face was thoughtful.

"And yet, O my Sultan, we have fled hither with no more than a hundred weary men. The caliphs looked for thee to come with greater power. Thy son has armed his followers at some expense. It were wiser to make gifts of some of these precious stones—to reward those who are to serve thee."

"If I throw meat to dogs, they will howl for more." Muhammad closed and locked the chest. "Nay, I have a whip that will rouse them. Go thou to the strongest hold upon this border!"

"To Istar? The rock of Istar?" Omar hesitated. "Verily it lieth far to the north, in the higher ranges; behind it is the sea itself."

"And so is Istar made safe by Allah. Keep thou the chests and await—" he was silent a moment—"what is written." Then, fingering the splendid hilts of the simitars, "Art assured that the mad Nazarene is dead?"

"As I have said. A slave hidden on the roof that was honored by thee beheld him lying lifeless on the carpet. Indeed, O my king, have the Mongols ever spared an armed man?"

"It may have been an omen."

Muhammad was as superstitious as most ignorant men of his time, and the apparition of the armed crusader, emerging from the fantasy induced by hashish, had startled him to the core. The Shah now wished that the Nazarene had been slain while he watched.

He waited until Omar's attendants had carried out the chests, and the amir made his farewell.

"Upon thee be the Prophet's peace!"

"Within the mountains, behind the rock of Istar," muttered Muhammad, "thou wilt find ease and solace—"

When Omar had gone he clapped his hands and a powerful Nubian entered, armed with a long tulwar—a negro whose tongue had been cut out in childhood, who knew no law save the will of the Shah. To him Muhammad entrusted the cotton bundle, forbidding him to leave the inner chamber of the pavilion. Not until then did the lord of Kharesmia summon his retinue and go forth to meet his nobles in *divan*.

And then indeed did Muhammad show the fire that had elevated him among the peoples of Islam.

At the council he scanned the rows of attentive faces—some bewildered and doubtful by reason of his small following and the rumors of defeats—and caught their interest with his first words—

"I have come to you, among all others, to lead ye to victory over the unbelievers!"

He called on them by name, remembering their deeds, and praising them greatly,

naming them servants of Allah, sowers of destruction, shields of the faithful. Some there were who had fought in Palestine against the crusaders; others had driven the weakened soldiery of the Greek empire out of Asia Minor.

He likened them to the companions of the Prophet, thundering out a tribute—

"There dies no lord of ye a quiet death in his bed, and never is blood of ye poured out without vengeance; verily I say your blood streams forth from the edge of the whetted swords!"

The well-known words of the Koran stirred the embers of fanaticism, and Muhammad fed the embers with fresh fuel until they rocked on their heels and ground their teeth.

He drew both his swords, and, holding the hilts in one hand, cast away the gold inlaid scabbards, crying that he would not put down the blades until the invaders had been driven from the land. At this one chieftain after another sprang up, and simitars flashed over jeweled turban crests.

"Lead us!" they shouted. "O chosen of Allah!"

"Nay," he cried response, "I am no more than a servant of the All-Wise, who hath opened to us the way of victory. The Khan of the barbarians is beyond the desert; their horses are weary, and their strength is divided in little bands. At dawn we will lift the standard of conquest and advance along the valley, penning the infidels between the hills and the river. Go now, and make ready thy men."

That night the fires were kept alight, and few slept; the roar of voices, the clatter of steel, the stamping of restless chargers did not cease until cymbals clanged the summons to saddle. But throughout the night the Shah sat attended only by the black mute, his bundle ready to his hand and in his sunken eyes the uneasy fever of hashish.

SIR HUGH, trotting through the mists that morning, had his first sight of the Horde.

Coming abreast a ravine they were halted by mounted sentries and the crusader beheld some two thousand warriors encamped between the rock walls of the gorge. They wore chain mail and black helmets that, with the wide leather drop, almost hid their faces; the horses, too, were black.

"The Kerait clan, of the *orda*,"* Kutsai told him. "But the Eagle is not with them. He has gone up the valley with the archers."

Here, unexpectedly, Nureddin announced that he would not go on. He complained of illness and saddle sores, and said if the Cathayan would make his peace with the black horsemen, he would wait until they came back.

"He sniffs a battle," Kutsai smiled as they galloped on, "and is wiser than we."

"Two nights ago," replied the crusader, "he told me that the Kharesmians have mustered a host beyond here, and await the coming of Muhammad—a host of twenty thousand swords."

The Cathayan glanced into the thinning mist.

"It seemed to me the astrologer knew more than he would say. If there is a battle we will need to look for the *Orluk*, the Eagle in the center of the clans."

"How many men has he?"

Kutsai thought for a moment.

"Thou hast seen the *orda*—the armored cavalry. The Eagle would have three *tumans* of bowmen with him—three thousand. And the clan of the khan of Almalyk is across the river."

"Then will thy leader withdraw upon Rai, where he might make a stand against such numbers?"

"We may not. The code of the Khan saith otherwise and even his own son did not withdraw when Muhammad took him by surprize. Nor is the Eagle like to fly away from a foe."

Sir Hugh was cheered by this, and urged forward the gray stallion, so that the Cathayan's big roan was laboring to keep up. The mists cleared and they found themselves entering a grassy valley,

*Horde—in the beginning it meant the village, but it came to mean the center of the clan

a league in width, with wooded hills on one hand, the gleam of a river between willow groves on the other. And presently they made out what seemed to be a horse herd in the center of the valley.

As they drew nearer Sir Hugh saw that it was made up of bands of Mongol archers, each man having a spare horse on his bridle. He noticed that the detachments were a hundred strong and that a warrior with a red horsehair crest to his helmet seemed to be the captain of each company—also, strangely enough, the archers had chosen to mount the inferior of the two horses in every case. In the years of life among the Arabs, Sir Hugh had learned to judge the small and fleet beasts of Asia.

As they passed the officers saluted Kutsai, who turned toward the group surrounding the standard—a long pole bearing buffalo horns and a bar from which nine yak tails hung. Mounting the ridge on which the standard had been placed, Sir Hugh reined in with an exclamation.

Not two hundred paces beyond the ridge the Kharesmian army was drawn up in battle array.

His eyes glowed as he scanned the brilliant line of warriors extending from the distant hills to the woods by the river. After years of wandering he saw again the green banners that he had faced in Palestine, heard the shrill clamor of *nakars*, the taunting shouts of individual horsemen who curveted in the open before the first rank.

In that single glance Sir Hugh judged the strength of the Muhammadan array—the splendid horses of the Persian warriors whose silvered mail gleamed like fire; the clouds of sheepskin-clad Turkomans.

The shaggy ponies of the Mongols beside him were cropping the rich grass eagerly, one foot out-thrust. No trace of a formation was visible; the warriors, leaning on their saddle horns, were gazing attentively at the Muhammadans. Even the bows were in the sheaths. Kutsai had left his side.

Again the *nakars* sounded behind the Kharesmians, and the green standards dipped, moved forward. Sir Hugh knew that it was impossible for these bands of nomads to stand against the charge of those mailed ranks.

And he was in no mood to run from the Muhammadans. If this was to be the end of the road he would not shun it. Slipping the steel hood over his head, he drew taut the lacings at his throat. Drawing the sword Durandal, he gathered up the reins of the gray stallion and spurred down the ridge toward the oncoming Kharesmians.

IT WAS unlooked-for—past belief. Every head in the first rank of the Muhammadans turned toward the solitary rider who advanced without shield or lance on the swift moving stallion that every warrior coveted at once.

They had never seen—except for the few Seljuks—a warrior of Frankistan, or a sword like the long blade in his hand. No one followed him.

Then he reined in and cried at them in sonorous Arabic:

"*Yah shatyr, yah rahb!* O ye who slay, where is the champion of your king?"

One of those in advance, a dark-skinned Seljuk, swooped forward as a swallow skims the earth.

"Dog of a Nazarene! Thy death shall delight the eyes of my sultan."

In his right arm the warrior gripped a long lance, his left clutched a round shield against his shoulder. Only his blazing eyes peered over the shield's rim from either side the steel nasal.

Sir Hugh reined in, erect in the saddle, and swerved Kutb to his right hand as the Seljuk came at him. The lance, on the far side of the horse's neck, shot past without touching him, and the knight, twisting in the saddle, lashed down at his foe's shield.

The heavy blade hit through wood and leather and crushed in the man's chest, flinging him back over the horse's rump. A shout of anger greeted the downfall of the Seljuk, and a second rider galloped at Sir Hugh—a powerful Kharesmian in silvered mail.

He had seen the Christain's sword slash through his companion's shield and he maneuvered his nimble-footed charger warily until he saw a chance to dash in from the left. He raised a short battle ax as he closed with the knight.

Sir Hugh gripped the man's upflung right arm between shoulder and elbow and held it so. Snarling, the Muhammadan struggled to free himself, and then—no novice at close fighting—slipped his shield to grasp one of the daggers in his girdle.

Before he could strike, Sir Hugh raised his sword and brought down the massive pommel on the Kharesmian's forehead. His skull shattered, the man slumped over his saddle horn, and the frightened horse plunged on.

There was barely time for the solitary Nazarene to parry the stroke of a third foe. Kutb reared, and a simitar flashing down from the other side wrenched into the loose mail of his shoulder.

"Ha!" Sir Hugh struck right and left with all his strength. A man leaned toward him, teeth agleam, eyes glaring. He thrust savagely with the point—saw the man's eyes redden—felt another horse plunge into the gray stallion, who shifted his footing shrewdly to meet the impact, and knew that he was surrounded.

He heard a curious hissing in the air, followed by a series of crashes, as if axes were splintering shields. A warrior who had thrust a shield into his eyes swerved and fell from the saddle with an arrow through his beard. A horse screamed, and Sir Hugh saw other empty saddles.

Then hoofs thudded behind him. A wave of dark ponies enveloped Kutb. Strong hands gripped his sword arm, and the reins were snatched from his other hand.

Kutb was jerked around, and when Sir Hugh was able to look about him he saw that he was being hurried up the ridge in the center of a group of Mongols. Other bowmen were plying their shafts at the Kharesmians.

When he galloped over the ridge the Mongols turned and darted off in headlong flight after their standard which was already in retreat.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PAVILION OF THE SHAH

THERE was no slightest doubt that the Mongols were fleeing. Only the rearmost companies attempted to use their bows. And behind them rose the high-pitched ululation of triumph.

"*Allah, il'lahi!*"

Sir Hugh sheathed his sword with a grimace. His left shoulder was bleeding and he thought that at least one bone in it was broken. He was grateful for Kutb's even pace and wondered how the Mongols managed to handle his reins with their own and keep the extra mounts galloping beside them.

Natural enough that they should retreat, he reasoned. A glance over his shoulder showed that the Kharesmian cavalry was in full pursuit. The foot soldiers had been left behind.

For a while he was occupied with his wound and the saddle which had become slippery from blood. Then he was aware that the Mongols were scattering, the detachments spreading out over the valley. Better to have kept together, he thought, for they could not pass the river and would only be hunted down in the hills.

The gallop slowed to a trot, none too soon for the sweat-soaked Kutb, and Sir Hugh noticed something unusual in the flight of the Mongols. The detachments, each with its officer, had kept intact. They were moving outward in a kind of fan-shaped formation, so that the wings lagged behind the center.

Again he looked back. The more sluggish Muhammad cavalry had fallen behind a mile or so, and the clouds of Turkomans and well-mounted Seljuks were in full cry on the heels of the Mongols.

"St. Giles!" Sir Hugh began to wonder.

From somewhere came the now familiar roll of kettle-drums, and at this signal the

warriors around him jumped down and checked the horses. Swiftly they changed saddles from the jaded mounts to the faster horses that they had kept at the bridle. Then, springing into the saddle again, they whipped out and strung their bows, fitting arrows to string.

In that moment of quiet Sir Hugh had a clear view of the valley—the Mongol detachments in the form of a half-circle, from the hills to the river bank—charging headlong into this half-circle the masses of triumphant tribesmen on sweating, foaming horses. The nearest Turkomans were barely a hundred paces distant from him, yelling like fiends incarnate.

And then the Mongols began to send their arrows into the tribesmen. They rose in their stirrups, broad shoulders tensing, pulling the feathered tips of the arrows to the ear.

"St. Giles of the Bow!" breathed the crusader, wiping the sweat from his eyes.

The arrows made a gigantic *whirring* in the air, as if in all the valley birds were rising from the ground. Empty saddles appeared among the leading Turkomans. Riders and horses rolled into the tall grass and the screaming of wounded men and beasts broke through the war cries.

The tribesmen wavered, some pressing forward, others reining in. They flung up their light shields, but the heavy shafts tore through wood and leather, emptying more saddles until the Turkomans, who had expected to harry a beaten foe, swerved and galloped back more quickly than they had come.

At once the officer of each Mongol detachment darted forward. The warriors followed. And, in the center of the valley, the standard was lifted again.

Instinctively, lacking discipline and any leader, the Turkomans had drawn closer together and the Mongol wings herded them up the valley as sheep are driven by dogs that race far out to the sides. From left and right and rear the arrows sped into the mass of men and beasts, until the Turkomans fled blindly, slinging their shields over their backs and lashing their horses.

"They will break the array of the heavy cavalry," Sir Hugh thought, "if they turn not aside."

The main body of Persian horse was coming up at a trot—some four thousand warriors in mail, who had kept their formation. Planning, evidently, to cut the Mongols off from the hills, they had tended to that side of the valley and toward them the harassed tribesmen raced, only to be greeted by a line of lowered lances. Experienced in battle, the Persians did not intend to let the fugitives crash into their array.

Howling, the Turkomans, still dropping under the long flight of the arrows, changed course again and lashed their horses toward the woods on the right, where a wide gorge yawned.

Sir Hugh had seen that gorge before. He forgot the ache of his wound when he heard the shrill *harr-rhum!* of the kettledrums that seemed to be accompanying the Mongol standard.

At once the Horde emerged from the mouth of the ravine. A hundred riders trotted out in the first line, their horses covered with sheets of heavy leather, long lances upraised over their helmets.

There were five ranks of lances, then an interval, and five ranks of swordsmen. This first *tuman*, as soon as it was clear of the brush and loose boulders, quickened its pace to a gallop. The second *tuman*, following it, did likewise.

Sir Hugh, moving toward the battle as swiftly as he could urge the tiring stallion, beheld it from afar as if so many miniature warriors were maneuvering on a vast green chessboard. Some of the Turkomans escaped through the narrowing gap between the Persian wing and the onrushing Horde. But remnants of the tribesmen, driven like spume before an advancing wave, fled into the ranks of Persians who, at that moment, were wheeling to face the charge of the *tumans*.

Gallant fighters and good horsemen, the Persians were at sore disadvantage. At full gallop, the powerful chargers of the Horde, rushing shoulder to shoulder, came down the slope on their flank.

Drawing nearer, Sir Hugh could see clearly the overwhelming of the desperate Persians. The plumed helmets sank under the black tide of the Horde. Muhammadan horsemen were accustomed to charging in open order, fighting individual duels. They faced the mass of the Horde, but all fire had left them and from the other sides came steadily that storm o shafts, tearing through light mail, dropping the horses under them.

Into this mass of struggling men the crusader plunged, hewing a path through the crowded Muhammadans with his long sword, guiding Kutb by his knees alone. It seemed only a moment that he heard the splintering of wood, the clash of steel and the panting of frenzied warriors.

Then the ground in front of him cleared. The Persians were fleeing before the Horde, leaving half their number dead.

THE sky was a mass of dark clouds, moving before a rising wind. The air had grown cold.

Sir Hugh sat on the rocky crest of a knoll, the mail coif thrown back from his head. His shoulder, stiffening, had begun to throb, and his sword arm was bruised and quivering. Like Kutb, who stood at the base of the knoll with heaving flanks, the crusader, after hours of fighting, had been forced to rest.

A half mile or so up the valley the pride of Islam—the unconquered warriors of the caliphs—stood at bay against the onset of the Mongol bowmen.

The surviving Persians had retreated to the shelter of the green banners, and Sir Hugh had seen the Mongols alter their tactics again. The Horde had divided into companies, slipping the lances over their shoulders, sheathing their sabers. Drawing their bows, they had shot into the close-drawn ranks of Muhammaden horse and foot, circling beyond the effective range of the smaller bows used by the caliphs' warriors.

"The flight was a trick," Sir Hugh meditated aloud. "They led the Muhammadans on until the steeds of the pursuers grew weary. Then they turned and smote each band, driving it back upon the others."

Drawing nearer the knoll a grotesque black figure ran from body to body, stripping gold and silver from girdle and turban. Sir Hugh recognized Nureddin's sugar loaf hat and curling beard.

"Eh," cried the astrologer when he came up to Kutb, "thou hast seen! It is the magic of Cathay that scatters armed hosts like dried grass."

"No magic," responded the crusader sternly, "but skill with the bow and obedience to the command of a wise leader."

Nureddin had the grace to be ashamed of his plundering, and tried to conceal a bulging sack under his robe.

"A day of calamity," he mourned. "The swordsmen of the Prophet went to their graves as to beds. *Ai-al*"

His little eyes shone with the lust of unlimited gain—for the Mongol detachments in the rear would touch no plunder. They were driving captured horses into herds, tying swords and shields to the saddles, and moving up the valley after the fighting forces.

Harr-rrum—arr-rrum!

Again the kettle-drums beat the summons to onset and Sir Hugh climbed stiffly into a blood-stained saddle. The Muhammadans, after trying vainly to close with the circling Mongols, had lost heart in the face of the storm of arrows and were retreating, the green banners moving up the valley under a lowering sky.

And the mailed *tumans*, closing into the ten-rank formation, were preparing to charge.

Sir Hugh did not join the fighting again that day.

Though he pressed Kutb, he could not come up with the standard. Riderless horses galloped around him and the valley bed was covered with dying Kharesmians and those trying to make their way to the hills. Darkness hid the slaughter, and rain fell heavily.

"Woe! Woe to the faithful!" A voice wailed near at hand.

"Fly!" Some one cried, unseen. "The

Shah hath forsaken us, and the wrath of God is visited upon us."

A flurry of hoofs in the wet grass, the whistle of a saber and a moan indicated that a passing Mongol had struck down the wailer. Sir Hugh kept his sword in hand, because in the darkness he might easily be mistaken for one of Muhammad's followers, and he could not answer a challenge. To fly! He smiled wryly. Where was he to find a road that led back to Europe, and how pass through the strongholds of the Muhammadans?

He drew some comfort from the thought that the Kharesmian emperor might be wandering like himself in the storm.

After a while he heard at one side a curious clanking and swishing and grunting. It grew louder and seemed to keep abreast him. *Clink-clonk.* Those were surely bells, but what bells would be passing over a battlefield at night?

He smelled camels, and when lightning flickered, saw through the driving rain a line of ungainly beasts roped together. Beside the caravan rode Mongol guards, sheepskins over their shoulders.

Sir Hugh remembered that he had seen that caravan not long ago—the first of the Mongol baggage train, pushing forward to join the Horde. From time to time the guards shouted response to a harsh challenge, and the crusader edged in closer to the camels, understanding that they must be bound for the main camp, wherever it might be.

Before long a lantern bobbed into sight ahead of him and a patrol of lancers trotted out of the darkness. One of them lifted the lantern to look at him and there was a murmur of guttural voices.

"*Ahatou!*" The leader of the patrol sheathed his sword and lifted his right hand, and Sir Hugh remembered that in this fashion the Cathayan prince had been saluted.

The Mongols indicated by signs that he must come with them, and as they seemed friendly, he accompanied them without question. Presently they passed a line of sentries, and entered the lighted tents of a camp.

"MUHAMMAD," said Kutsai thoughtfully, "has vanished. In the battle he was with the green banners of the caliphs but he fled alone. And alone he came to this *yamen.* Look!"

Sitting upon a brocade couch, the tall Cathayan pointed at some objects on the carpet that covered this inner chamber of the great *toph* that had been prepared for the Shah by his people. Near the teak pole of the pavilion lay a satin tunic and a fine *khalat* of cloth-of-gold, wet and splashed with mud. Thrown down haphazard were silk trousers and pearl-sewn slippers, and the unmistakable green turban with the emerald crest.

"These simitars were his," went on the Cathayan philosopher, brushing his long fingers through the tip of his beard. "Slaves say that the Shah dismounted and ran into this chamber where a black man stood guard. Master and man left by another opening. What is the meaning of this?"

Sir Hugh, working off his mail with the help of a Mongol warrior, shook his head. Kutsai dipped an exploring finger into an ivory jar and sniffed the brown powder dubiously.

"This stuff breeds dreams. Muhammad may have sought forgetfulness, and that means he was afraid. He would be, I think. Here he changed his garments in haste and separated from his men. Perhaps he has made himself a pilgrim, or even an astrologer."

Sir Hugh looked down in surprize, but the wide brown eyes of the prince were thoughtful.

"It comes to me now—Muhammad dreaded defeat, and made ready this way of escape. He covered his flight with the bodies of ten thousand of his followers."

"If he abandoned his men to save his life, God will judge his sin."

Kutsai inclined his head.

"The power of *T'ien,* of Heaven is illimitable, but upon the earth the Khan is master of all men. Alas, that I, a former servant of the Golden Dynasty, should say this—the princes of Cathay were unworthy and *he* cast them down.

And Pestrer John of Asia in like manner. The Muhammadans cry that Heaven's wrath is visited upon them. Can this be so? Perhaps there are times when earth's rulers grow false and weak, and at such times a barbarian is sent with a sword out of the desert—" Arms folded in his sleeves the Cathayan meditated. "Since my youth I have been the councilor of Genghis Khan, and he is no more than a barbarian chieftain wiser than other rulers in the art of war. He is like tempered steel, unswerving and unbreakable. Those who serve him he spares not and yet upon those who are faithful in all things he bestows power vaster than that of your Cæsars."

That day Sir Hugh had seen the downfall of the caliphs, who had withstood the hosts of crusaders for generations, and he asked a blunt question—

"Wherein lies the power of this Khan?"

Kutsai smiled, and answered promptly.

"Obedience! One who is infallible inspires respect. One who seeks no gain for himself inspires reverence. Every Mongol from here to Kambalu lives only to serve the Khan. And," he added with a smile, "he is aided by the wisdom of Cathay."

"The Muhammadans say thou art a magician."

"It was said also of Prester John, the Christian. When men do not understand a thing they say it is witchcraft."

Kutsai withdrew a hand from his sleeve and showed in his palm a round box of bamboo. The cover of the box was transparent crystal, a silk thread suspended from its center. At the end of the thread hung a long splinter of steel, so balanced that it quivered and turned slowly from side to side.

"The blue tip of the needle," the Cathayan explained, "points always to the south. It hath been touched by a lodestone. This needle would guide thee on a straight path in the darkest night."

Sir Hugh looked at it curiously. Indeed, no matter how the Cathayan moved the box, one end of the needle turned ever toward the tent pole.

"Without this," the philosopher added, "we could not cross the deserts. Only the commanders of a *tuman* and the higher officers are allowed to possess the south-pointing boxes."

"Nureddin said you broke down the strong walls of cities by enchantment."

"By mixing saltpeter with a little sulphur and clay we have made what we call *pao*, a blasting fire. By penning the *pao* within large bamboos and stopping the ends with iron, and then touching it with fire we have found that the blast will shatter a gate or uproot a tower."

In silence the crusader pondered this until it was clear in his mind.

"In my land we would call thee an alchemist and doubtless we would set thee to making gold, so that merchants and princes would profit. I have been reared in the use of weapons and my knowledge is no more than that. Tell me, then, of what I would know. How did the Horde know that Muhammad would come down the valley with his host?"

Kutsai replaced his south-pointing box in his sleeve and smiled a little.

"Subotai—the Eagle. His scouts were leagues in advance of the Horde; they watched during the night when the Muhammadans made a great tumult, praying and shouting and mustering their forces."

Above the lash of rain on the pavilion top the slapping of hoofs in mud could be heard, the jangle of bit chains and the muffled clash of steel, echoed by deep-throated laughter and shouts of greeting. Kutsai stepped to the silk partition, listened and hastened back to his companion.

"Now will thy fate be decided, lord of the Nazarenes. The Eagle has come back from the Horde, without sending word to me. If thou art able, stand!"

Sir Hugh rose to his feet, resting his good arm on the wide hand guard of Durandal, for his shoulder pained him and loss of blood had weakened his limbs. Kutsai glanced at him with some anxiety and whispered swiftly.

"Do not look for mercy. The Eagle tears with his talons more often than he lifts with his wings. Bear thyself boldly and answer from an open heart—that is the only help for thee."

The flap of the partition was thrust back, a gust of wind whirled through chamber, setting the lanterns to swinging, and a man stood between them—a warrior whose like Sir Hugh had never beheld.

Tall as the crusader, his limbs were massive as a bear's, and his mighty body seemed to roll forward on its bowed legs as if driven in by the wind. In a single movement he unclasped and tossed away a dripping sable cloak and lacquered helmet from which hung an eagle's feather. His armor was black lacquer, his under tunic, wide-sleeved, was soft shagreen. His broad, dark face outthrust from high shoulders had an animal's alertness and vitality; but his long hair was red and his eyes—to Sir Hugh' utter surprize—a clear blue.

"*Ahatou noyon Kitai!*" His drawling voice greeted the Cathayan, and his eyes went to the simitars lying on the carpet. He picked them up instantly, weighed them in a gnarled hand, tried the flexible steel and cast them down on the *khalat* of the Shah. "We have pulled a little hide from the running hare," he said in Mongol, "but the hare has vanished like an arrow shot into thick reeds."

Then his blue eyes fastened on Sir Hugh, and after a moment he held out his hand.

"*Timur*—the sword."

The crusader extended Durandal, the scabbard grasped midway in his right hand. He was captive to this pagan lord and Subotai was privileged to ask the surrender of his weapon. But Kutsai's fine eyes were shadowed by anxiety.

The Eagle gripped the hilt, and drew the long blade from the scabbard, still looking squarely at the wounded knight. The weight of the sword seemed to surprize him, and he took it in both hands, raising it above his head. Sir Hugh, holding the empty scabbard across his knees, made not the slightest movement when the Mongol general began to swing the sword.

To wield such a heavy weapon skill and supple muscles were more necessary than the sheer strength of a man like Subotai. The steel blade moved slowly over Sir Hugh's yellow head, but the Mongol's sinews cracked and he breathed deep. The gaze of neither man faltered.

"*Khai!*" Subotai said abruptly. "In the battle I saw this man wield the sword."

"And before that," Kutsai put in at once, "O *noyon* of the Horde, I saw him swing it in one hand, so that it whistled in the air. But now his bones have been broken and he has bled much."

"Who could lift it in one hand?" Subotai shook his head, unbelieving. "Let him take it, and I will judge of his strength."

Returning the sword to Sir Hugh, he stepped back, dropping a poweful hand upon the head of a short ax in his belt.

"Canst lift thy weapon, Nazarene?" Kutsai asked anxiously in Arabic. "Beyond all feats, the Eagle loves a feat of strength."

Without answering Sir Hugh planted his feet wide on the carpet, resting the tip of the long sword on the ground before him. He glanced at the teak pole that supported the pavilion, seasoned wood, as thick as a man's thigh. Setting his teeth and letting his left arm hang limp, he whirled up the blade.

He put forth every once of strength in him, heedless of a flame of agony in his left shoulder. Skilled in handling the sword, he swung it high and lashed down at the teak pole, striking it a yard above the ground.

So keen the edge of the sword, so great the impact, the hard wood cracked and split. The jagged end leaped out and darted into the earth, piercing the carpet at Subotai's side. The whole pavilion sank and billowed as the top was loosened by the shortening of the pole. The lanterns set up a mad dance.

Subotai had not moved, though the pole had brushed his hand.

"*Khail*" he shouted and his blue eyes gleamed. "A good stroke."

As he spoke he placed himself astride the slanting pole, wrapped both arms around it, and lifted. Sir Hugh, amazed, saw the Mongol walk back the five paces to the stump projecting fron the earth, bearing the weight of the pole and the rain-soaked pavilion top. Sticking the shortened tent pole beside its stump, he turned upon Sir Hugh swiftly.

"This youth rode alone against the *orda* of the Shah. I sent a *gur** to shield him with arrows and bring him back, because he stood his ground well. What quarrel had he with the men of the Shah?"

Seizing his opportunity, Kutsai related the crusader's story as he had heard it from Nureddin—the death of Khalil, and the challenge in Rai. "And there is a tale, Subotai Bahadur, that once this Nazarene held a castle gate against the emperor of the Roumis and his men. In him is high courage, and no falsehood."

"And in thee a woman's pity." Subotai's blue eyes were expressionless, until his wide lips smiled. "At least he is a warrior, though a little blood-letting weakens him. He shall come with me and find his death in the Horde."

Kutsai, arms folded in his long sleeves, bent his head. He had learned that it was useless to argue with a Mongol.

"Bring *tcha*," Subotai ordered, "and use thine arts to seek trace of the Shah. Be like a ferret in cunning. I will sleep."

He waited until the Cathayan summoned some attendants with a steaming bowl of tea. Quaffing this slowly, his eyes fell upon the crusader.

"Tend his wound. A man can not ride with broken bones, and he must go far in the saddle and fast."

So saying he flung himself down on the carpet, drew the wet sable cloak over his limbs, and after a few deep breaths slept as quietly as a child. He had been in the saddle for two days and nearly two nights.

"He saved thy life this day," Kutsai whispered to Sir Hugh, "and he wishes to see thee again in battle."

*A hundred warriors.

Persuading his friend to lie down on the couch, Kutsai and his Chinese servants washed out the knight's wound with warm water and balsam, and set the broken collar bone cleverly. Then he bound Sir Hugh's left arm to his side and brought him the bowl filled with hot tea. Into the draught he must have put herbs, because drowsiness came upon the wounded man at once.

Fitfully—for the fever in his veins fought against the sedative the Cathayan had administered—Sir Hugh slept, waking at times when Mongol officers came to the tent and talked with Subotai.

Then the pavilion was deserted, all the lanterns but one darkened. Kutsai alone was visible, sitting by a little table on which was a board marked in silver and gold squares. In this board stood tiny images of kings and queens and priests and bowmen on prancing horses. From time to time the philosopher would stretch out his hand and move one of the pieces to another square.

It seemed to the feverish knight that this man was, after all, a magician, weaving a spell by the aid of these effigies.

The rain still pattered on the pavilion, and a voice cried out of the storm:

"Woe to Islam! O ye who believe, the wrath of God is at hand!"

The next day the rain had ceased, but the air was chill and some Mongol guards came in and made a fire in a brazier by the couch. They gave Sir Hugh fermented milk to drink, and he fell into a heavy sleep, troubled by a curious dream.

It seemed to him that he was mounted on Kutb, riding along a shore of a sea. The rush of the surf came nearly to the horse's hoofs, and the cries of gulls filled the air. They were galloping, Kutb and he, along the shore seeking a road that would lead back to England and Christian folk, but whenever he looked away from the sea only the salt desert met his eyes.

They dared not draw rein, Kutb and he, for fear the sea would disappear and the road be lost forever, and they would be alone in the salt desert.

CHAPTER IX

TWO ROADS

FOR several days Sir Hugh saw nothing of the Cathayan or the Eagle. The fever had left him, and he was possessed by a vast hunger, to which his guards ministered methodically and in silence. They brought him roast joints of mutton, and sugared fruits and jellies that were part of the spoil of the Shah's camp.

When Kutsai appeared again it was in haste and clad for the saddle. He examined his friend's shoulder, nodded with satisfaction.

"Our scouts brought in captives," he said, "and I have learned from them that Rokneddin fled to the east, taking the road to Bagdad. But Omar was seen, going with a few camels to the north, toward the mountains. It is clear that Muhammad hath departed from this camp and is hastening in disguise upon one of the two roads. Subotai gave command to divide the Horde, half to go with him to the north, and half to ride toward Bagdad under leadership of the khan of Almalyk. I go to Bagdad."

While he talked he replaced Sir Hugh's bandages and deftly wound upon his shoulder a loose sling to hold the left arm.

"Do not use that hand. In Bagdad I have heard are the academies and mosques of the caliphs—the library of a certain Haroun al-Rashid, and there will I find scholars who will help me finish my map, who will have tables of the movements of the planets, to verify mine. A pleasant city, a place of ease. Come, then, with me, for the road is smooth and straight."

"What of the Eagle?"

Kutsai's brow clouded.

"His is the road beset by peril, guarded by the tribes of the *shan*—of the hills. I do not know what lies beyond the ranges, but winter draws on and the snow increases on the far summits. Subotai will never turn back. He will ride with his men even to the *ta tsin*, the edge of the world. With him, life will not long endure. The choice is thine."

"Whose captive am I, Lord Kutsai?"

"Ah!" The Cathayan smiled. "The Mongols take neither slaves nor captives. What king dost thou serve, O Nazarene?"

"For twelve winters I have not set foot upon the land of Frankistan. My liege lord is in his tomb, and of his successors I know not."

"Good!" Kutsai seemed to draw satisfaction from this. "Wilt give obedience to the great Khan, Genghis?"

Sir Hugh considered, chin on hand.

"Aye, so. For the sultan of the Kharesmians is my sworn foe, and to the warriors of the Eagle do I owe my life."

"Then ponder the debt of obedience. Thou must obey without question all commands of the *gur* and *orkhans*, of the bearers of the falcon and eagle and tiger tablets. It will be forbidden thee to lift hand against a Mongol, to steal or to utter an untruth. Death is the reward of transgression. In battle thou must keep thy face toward the foe, save when the standard is carried back. When a comrade of thy ten* is wounded, thou or another must bear him from the conflict; if one is taken, thou or another must succor him."

"In that there is no dishonor," Sir Hugh made response. "And this obedience I will give."

Kutsai inclined his head.

"Forget not, it is forbidden to take spoil, even though no eyes may behold thee. All weapons and gold and horse must be given to the officers of the Khan."

"Aye so."

"And think not to flee from the Eagle. In the darkest night, eyes will see and swift hoofs will follow. The road of obedience will try thy strength and at the end—what awaits thee?"

Sir Hugh sprang up and clapped a stalwart hand upon the thin shoulder of the philosopher.

"Verily, the Dragon was a fair omen! Aforetime the Arabs told me a tale, of far-wandering. They said that beyond these mountains lies a sea, wherein all the

* The smallest unit of the Horde.

birds of the earth do come at certain seasons—a vast sea, penned on two sides between mighty ranges, and on two sides between deserts. And the name of it is the Sea of the Ravens."

Kutsai's fine eyes were incredulous and when he had thought for a moment he said gravely:

"That may not be. In the first cycle of the Heavenly emperor, the great waters were divided from the earth, so that the seas surrounded the land. In this desert country there can be no great water."

"And yet, Lord Kutsai, thou hast seen the desert of salt and sand. Was not that once the shore of this hidden sea?"

"Ah! It may be so. My son, thou art wise beyond thy years. Come with me. and help draw my map."

Sir Hugh shook his head.

"Nay, father of wisdom, I was bred to the sword, and I have no skill save that. If the sea is there, I shall embark upon it. Surely it must lead beyond the lands of paynimry, to Christian folk."

"I, too," observed the prince after a pause, "long for my home. I would like to go back to my garden that is fringed with bamboo and azalea and dark pine trees, above a pool that is a haven of meditation. I would like to watch my grandchildren eating mulberries. Upon my roof I would sit, studying the course of the Fire Star.* Alas! I grieve, because we must part."

"Farewell, Lord Kutsai! I shall follow the Eagle."

"Aye—I knew thy mind. I fear for thee. Nureddin, who stripped gold from the slain, was seen by the Eagle and now he waits at the *yamen* gate. Wait thou in the pavilion until a summons comes."

Clasping his hands over his breast, the Cathayan philosopher bent his head, turned and strode from the pavilion. Sir Hugh heard chariot wheels rattle away, followed by the hoofs of the escort. After a while, bethinking him of Nureddin, he went forth to stand by the guards and look around the camp, rejoicing in the sunlight and the brisk wind.

In the cleared space before the entrance Nureddin hung. His curling beard was sadly limp, his shaggy head rested strangely on one shoulder. Going closer, the crusader saw that he was bound to a stake by a cord passed under his arms.

The astrologer's mouth was open, the tongue hanging upon one side, and from his throat protruded the end of a pearl necklace that had strangled him.

AT THE end of a week Sir Hugh was able to move his left arm, and rest and good food had restored his strength, so that he took long walks about the camp, observing the Mongols and picking up some words of their speech. And then he was roused from sleep before sunrise by a young warrior who held an iron lantern close to his eyes.

The visitor wore a sheepskin jacket and heavy woolen breeches, thrust into high deerskin boots. His forehead was bound with leather strips, to which was attached a hood that covered his features except a pair of alert black eyes.

"*Khoudsarma!*" He raised his hand to his lips and forehead. "My lord! A command hath come for thee."

He spoke fluent Arabic, and Sir Hugh, rising at once, saw that he wore no weapon but a short saber. Around his throat hung a silver falcon tablet, and a leather wallet—insignia of a dispatch rider.

"Is thy strength mended?" he asked earnestly. "I have orders to guide thee, but I may not wait for thee to pick thorns from thy skin or to make fires."

Sir Hugh, drawing on his mail hauberk, looked up suddenly.

"My horse Kutb—"

"Aye, the Master of the Herds hath an order to forward the gray stallion by the first northbound caravan. He will be led, not ridden. Be thou at ease as to him, for no one horse—nay, not Afrasiab's own—may carry thee upon the road we take."

He held out a long wolfskin surcoat with a hood.

*Mars.

"Snow is in the passes, my lord. Subotai bids thee hasten."

Two horses were waiting for them—a slender Arab pacer that the courier mounted, and a big-boned Persian charger. Sir Hugh bound his surcoat on the crupper of the saddle and noticed that saddlebags were already in place. He wondered why there was no escort and where they would get fresh mounts, until a mandarin of Cathay came up with a lantern and handed the Mongol rider a roll of paper bound with red silk.

This the courier put into his wallet, and the mandarin made a note upon a tablet, the guards stepped back, and the two riders trotted through the shadowy masses that were the pavilions of Muhammad's camp. At the outer sentry post mounted archers drew aside at a glimpse of the silver falcon.

Without a word the young Mongol bent forward, the bells attached to his girdle jingling, tightening knee and rein, and the pacer began to glide away from Sir Hugh. He touched the charger with his spurs, and they went forward at a gallop, the horses snorting, the men chilled by the frost in the air, watchful of the darkness into which the gray ribbon of the road stretched.

The sun came up in a haze and the day grew no warmer, but the steady riding stirred Sir Hugh's blood and he felt at peace with the monotonous world on either side of them. Not a living man was to be seen, though there were villages in the clearings by tranquil streams. Through the blue haze he could make out a dark ridge white on its summit and—although they pushed the horses hard until noon—the mountains drew no nearer.

When they came suddenly upon a company of Mongols escorting some camels northward, the courier pulled in and dismounted, taking the best horse he could find among the warriors and giving Sir Hugh the next best. Here they were given drinks of mare's milk and a little cheese.

"I am Arslan of the Uighur *orda*," the young rider vouchsafed as they started off, again at a gallop. "Until the last grass I carried the *yamkh** from Kambalu."

"Do the Muhammadans make trouble for thee upon the road?"

"At first they shot arrows; now they have gone away. But bands of dogs in black hats make raids on the caravans. *Akh*, they are more ready to run than to raid."

"Is it far to the *Orluk?*"

"Aye, far!"

"Is he in the mountain passes?"

"We will know when we find him." Arslan glanced at Sir Hugh's big body and the heavy sword askance. "*Akh*, thou art weighty. Thy horses will fall behind."

This seemed to trouble the carrier of the *yamkh*, because he shook his head from time to time, and glanced impatiently at the sun. He was careful, however, to pull in and breathe his horse every little while.

"What was the command of the *Orluk?*" Sir Hugh asked.

"To bring thee alive and unhurt to the Horde. They have come upon the tracks of the sultan."

"The Shah? Where?"

Arslan pointed to his left.

"At a place called Hamadan. He wore the garments of a pilgrim, and there were many with him. A *gur* khan scattered them, and learned afterward that he was the Shah, Muhammad. Then the Eagle took up the chase. It led north, into the foothills."

Sir Hugh thought that Kutsai, after all, had the easier road. Nothing was more certain than that there would be hard fighting where Muhammad fled.

A little after sunset they arrived at the first station of the post route—a group of heavy wagons bearing dome-shaped felt tents. A score of Mongols seated around a dung fire greeted Arslan respectfully and stared at the crusader.

"It was in the command, O Nazarene lord," said the courier, as he dismounted and went to sniff at the pot boiling over

* Post.

the glowing dung, "that thou shalt sleep for three hours during the night. Eat now and then sleep."

And he muttered to himself as if begrudging the waste of precious hours. Well content, the crusader drew near to the fire and explored the simmering pot with his poniard, spearing strips of mutton until the first ache of hunger was satisfied. Then one of the warriors handed ed him a wooden cup and he ladled out the savory broth, quaffing mightily.

"Health to ye, messires," he smiled, "be ye paynim folk or wolf-men!"

The lined, bronzed faces of the nomads turned toward him silently and they watched with intense curiosity while he quenched his thirst and then washed hands and face in fresh, cold water. Some of them rose and made place for him close to the embers. Rolling himself in his fur surcoat and laying Durandal against his side, the crusader lifted his eyes to the stars, trying to pick out the Great Bear among the constellations that glittered in the cold air. Close to the ground, his ear caught a distant monotone of voices and a measured treading of hoofs from the outer darkness where the Mongol herders were singing as they rode around the horses of the station.

Then the stars seemed to lift to an immeasurable height, the Bear became distorted and took on the shape of a flying dragon. Almost as soon as his shoulders touched the ground, Sir Hugh had fallen asleep.

And still the warriors gazed stolidly at the mighty body of the knight, the sword that was longer than any they had ever seen—at his white forehead and the thick beard and hair the color of gold.

"What chieftain is he?" they asked Arslan, who was still eating methodically.

"*Akh!* A wandering chieftain who can not find the trail to his tribe's grazing ground."

"He has shoulders like a bear."

"True. He is strong," Arslan wiped greasy hands on his sheepskin and squatted nearer the embers. "And yet, O my brothers, he can not eat without sitting down, as ye have seen. Nor can he sleep without stretching out—thus, instead of gripping the saddle as a man should. When he rises up, he splashes in cold water like a buffalo in a watercourse on a hot day."

"*Hai!*" exlaimed the listeners.

"One merit he has," Arslan went on, mindful of his own importance. "Alone among the men of the Horde he knows the face of the Shah whom we seek."

They nodded understanding.

"He who rides down the Shah will be honored greatly—he will be given rare horses and the baton of a *gur* khan. From all punishment he will be free—even from the death punishment nine times. So the Eagle has promised."

Arslan assented, one eye on the stars and the treetops.

"That is good. But it is better to carry the *yamkh* over the roads of the world."

CHAPTER X

BEYOND THE RANGES

THE next day Arslan's bearing changed. He went on at a gallop as before—they had taken an extra horse from the station—but he bent to the side to study the ground he passed over. At times he reined in, to look closely at strange marks in the earth. After watching him for some time, Sir Hugh understood that they had left the highroad and were following the trail of the Horde. Certainly a multitude of horses had been over the ground before them.

And the aspect of the country had changed. They had climbed steadily, and swirling mists shut out all view of the heights above them, the plain that lay behind them.

They passed through dense timber—poplars at first, and bare gray beeches that gave place to dark masses of fir.

At times the croaking of ravens was heard overhead and the flutter of great wings. Arslan grinned under his leather hood.

"*Ai*, Nazarene, this is the pass. The

birds choose the lowest path through the mountains."

Although Sir Hugh saw them not, the young Mongol said that flights of duck and herons had swept over the forest. The wind rose as the short day merged into cloud-dimmed twilight and rain began to beat into their faces.

"Where is the station?" the knight asked when it was utterly dark and the wearied horses began to lag.

"Where is the moon?" retorted Arslan, irritated at their slow progress. "It is where it is and we are hanging back like women bearing burdens."

He dismounted to feel the ground underfoot and the horses stood with lowered heads and heaving flanks. Presently he appeared beside Sir Hugh and shouted above the rush of wind in the forest mesh.

"My lord, if we take thy three hours of sleep in this place, we will not come to fresh horses before daylight. Wilt thou go forward?"

"Lead, then," assented the crusader grimly.

The rain had changed to sleet, and he drew the fur hood close about his throat, settling himself in the saddle and dropping the rein over the saddle horn. Better in such a storm to let the horse pick its own way.

SNOW whirled down on the two men and the three horses that plodded over a bare shoulder of the range, above the timber line. It was no longer dark, because the white surface of the ground revealed boulders and the occasional twisted shape of a stunted tree. The wind no longer sighed overhead; it screamed and tore at them and rushed off to howl through unseen gorges. And the horses went forward more slowly with hanging heads.

"They will not face the storm!" Arslan came to Sir Hugh's stirrup and shouted above the blast of the wind. "This night the *tengri*, the demons of high and desolate places, are on the wing. Hark to them."

The rain had soaked through Sir Hugh's leg wrappings and the increasing cold numbed his feet.

"Dismount!" Arslan barked impatiently. "Lead thy pony."

Stiffly, the crusader swung down, stifling a grunt of agony as the blood started to course through his feet. Taking the rein over his arm he stumbled after the Mongol, who plunged ahead stooping over the snow as a hound quests for a scent.

The ponies, sheltered somewhat by the bodies of the men, quickened their pace a little. Sir Hugh found that when his limbs were warmed he was able to keep pace with the warrior easily, in spite of the weight of the sword.

They climbed interminably and only the comparative evenness of the footing convinced the crusader that they were still on the trail made by the Horde. Then they began to descend, and the third pony suddenly galloped ahead.

"*Akh!*" cried the courier. "He knows. There is something before us. Let us mount to the saddles, and the horses will find it."

For a while they dipped down, and the force of the wind increased. The snow seemed dryer—instead of large flakes it beat against them in hard particles that smarted on cheek and forehead.

But the wind had cleared long stretches of snow and here Sir Hugh made out huddled forms of horses and men. On the far side of these bodies the snow was piled, and it seemed to him as if a caravan caught by the blizzard had lain down to sleep. Only the bodies were twisted and sprawled sometimes one upon the other. Arslan paused to examine them and said they had not been plundered, and so must be Muhammadans slain by the Horde in passing.

Then one of the horses neighed and the other turned sharply to the right. In the driving snow a cluster of Mongol dome tents took shape, behind them a black huddle of horses crowded together, tails to the storm.

Arslan lashed the felt covering of a *yurta* with his whip, shouting shrilly.

"Out, ye squint-eyed devils—out, sons of a dog tribe! The post to Subotai Bahadur waits!"

He reenforced his whip with kicks that threatened to topple over the wicker frame of the tent, until dim figures crawled out of the entrance flap and a torch flamed dazzlingly in the glitter of the snow. Sir Hugh noticed that smoke curled from the tops of the domes, and he thought that the guards of the post station had been snug enough.

While fresh horses were being saddled Arslan came to his side and bowed, touching his hands to his forehead.

"Three hours of sleep was commanded, my lord, that is true. But thou canst sleep very easily in the saddle, if—"

"And it was also in the command to to bring me alive to the Horde," laughed Sir Hugh. Strangely, he no longer felt any pain and did not want food. "Go forward, if thou wilt. I will not fall behind."

"*Akh!*"

Arslan showed his white teeth in a hearty grin and hastened off to bully and lash the men of the station. He had food —barley cakes and warm milk—brought to his companion and sheepskins to wrap around the knight's legs and feet once Sir Hugh was installed in the saddle of a shaggy pony. The little steed grunted, feeling the weight of its rider, but made off nimbly after the others.

A dozen Mongols accompanied them, at Arslan's order, to point out the trail.

"Eh, my lord," he shouted in Sir Hugh's ear, "the wolves of these mountains showed their teeth. The riders of the black hats* attacked the rear of the Horde, to carry off horses."

"Where is the Horde?"

"At the heels of Muhammad."

"And where is he?"

Arslan glanced into the drift beyond the circle of leaping torchlight and shook his head.

"Heaven knows."

The warmth of the dry sheepskins and the inner glow of food filled Sir Hugh with delicious drowsiness. He could still hear the creaking of saddles, the spluttering of the pine torches, but the wind ceased to beat against him and he must have slept because he roused suddenly, aching in every limb. His horse had stumbled and nearly thrown him.

He opened his eyes and ceased to feel drowsy. He could see the black forms of the riders, the trampled snow of the trail. The blizzard had ceased, and dawn was breaking to his right. And beneath his right foot was an abyss, still veiled in darkness. From a thousand feet below him ascended the murmur of a rushing torrent.

His horse had stumbled within a foot of the precipice.

Thereafter, though Arslan slumbered tranquilly, propped in the high peaked saddle, Sir Hugh kept wide awake. They were rounding a ridge that seemed to be one of the high points of the pass—he could see the snow summits of the range stretching away to the right.

From dull red to glowing crimson these peaks changed, and then to flaming gold as the sun's rays struck them. Another moment and the snow-covered slope shone with intolerable brightness.

Arslan woke with a grunt, dismissed the escort and whipped his pony to a trot.

"The third day," he cried, "and we are not up with the standard."

As he spoke he pointed below them and, shading his eyes, Sir Hugh made out hundreds of black dots moving northward. Here the precipice had yielded to a long slope, boulder strewn and carpeted thick with soft snow. The riders who had gone before them had followed a traverse down the slope, winding back and forth a weary way to the bottom, some five hundred feet below.

Refreshed by sleep, Sir Hugh surveyed the sharp slope and dismounted.

"We can lead the horses straight down."

Arslan's nostrils expanded and his slant eyes glimmered.

"*Akh!*"

* Kara Kalpaks—probably Turkomans or Kurds.

He shook his head, but swung down as Sir Hugh went over the side, drawing the pony after him. Once started, the horse crowded down on the crusader. A hundred feet or so they made safely, then the man stepped on ice under the snow and lost his footing.

He began to slide, turning over and over, kicked by the struggling animal, until he loosed the rein and shot downward. By degrees the snow, wedged in front of his body, slowed his progress, and he came to a stop among a mass of boulders. Rising and shaking himself, little harmed—for the mail hauberk and the wolfskin surcoat swathed him completely—he beheld Arslan shoot past, caught between the forelegs of his pony.

The Mongol and his mount had gained considerable impetus and their slide lasted nearly to the bottom of the slope where they brought up in some brush.

Sir Hugh ran and slipped down, laughing heartily as he watched Arslan get up and shake himself and pull the snow from his neck. The courier glanced up at the trail they had left, felt of his wallet, and looked long at his companion. Arslan's lips were bloody and his pony limped.

"What is thy name?" he demanded abruptly.

"Hugh," the crusader responded.

"*Hui*," the Mongol repeated, and grinned. "*Hui-hui*, the swooping hawk! They named thee well. Come, let us get fresh horses from these laggards."

The two had arrived at the tail of the horsemen who were escorting the few pack animals of the Horde. Without delaying to eat, the courier selected new mounts and set out at a gallop. They could make fast time now, because the trail was trodden down, and the descent through the forest was easier going. They began to pass masses of the heavy cavalry of the Horde, the warriors drawing out of the road at sound of the courier's bells. Often, too, they came upon dead and exhausted horses and heard in the depths of the forest the howling of wolves.

SIR HUGH drew rein with an exclamation of wonder. The forest had thinned out and he had come to the edge of a plateau. Below him there was no snow, but fertile fields and vineyards, and beyond that miles of tall rushes, bending under the breath of a warm wind.

And beyond the rushes there stretched to the skyline the gray waters of a mighty sea. He could hear the pounding of the distant swell and the air in his nostrils was heavy with salt.

"Come!" cried Arslan. "We have not found the standard."

"It is the sea!"

"Aye, the sea. It will be there on the morrow."

Reluctantly—for he was feasting his eyes on the wide circle of the shore and the barrier of mountains that girdled it as far as the eyes could reach—Sir Hugh spurred after his escort.

By noon they had passed other companies of Mongol archers, all trotting toward the shore. Here the sun was warm as in Rai, the grape-vines still green. And about them—aroused by the multitude of horsemen—clamored all the birds of creation.

In the marshes stalked flamingoes and gray herons. Overhead in the willow and poplar growths resounded the clatter of crows and magpies and cormorants—and upon the branches sat in somber silence brown eagles and ruffled vultures.

"They will not go hungry this night," laughed Arslan, lifting his tired, bloodshot eyes.

Solitary among the flights of other birds, Sir Hugh observed slender falcons wheeling and dipping along the shore, and above these great swans that passed southward, long necks outstretched.

Over the surf swooped and screamed white-breasted gulls. The crusader watched one dart down suddenly and come up fluttering upon the swell with a fish glistening in its claws.

"It is the Sea of the Ravens!" he said, under his breath. "God grant it lead me to a Christian land."

Arslan glanced at the shore indifferently.

"It is vast and wide, but there are no sails upon it. The water is fit for fisherfolk, the land for warriors."

"No man of my people has set eyes upon this sea before."

The Mongol grunted.

"Then, if thou live to tell of it in thy *serais*, the wise men and merchants of thy place will mock thee, saying, 'Lo, this is an idle tale of a dog-born-dog!'" He nodded reflectively. "It is better," he added philosophically, "to bring back gold and silver things, even ivory."

All at once, he lashed his horse with his whip and uttered a shrill cry. They had rounded a promontory on the shore, and ahead of them he saw some five hundred Mongols urging on their jaded beasts. Far in advance of them galloped an unmistakable figure, beside the standard bearer—a stalwart warrior with flaming red hair.

"Aside, ye men of the Horde!" growled Arslan. "Make way for the bearer of tidings from the great Khan Genghis."

But, as the Mongols made way for them, and they were able to see the road ahead, Sir Hugh's gray eyes quickened with interest. The road swept out to the shore's edge, and here on a point of land that stretched far into the sea stood a walled city, its domes and minarets rising against the cloud-flecked sky.

CHAPTER XI

THE END OF THE ROAD

THAT morning the *Shah-im-shah*, the King of kings, had come to Istar, the westernmost stronghold of his empire, the very gate of Islam.

Unheralded and almost unattended, he had entered the house of the governor and seated himself in the guest room—whispering to himself, his head swaying on shoulders that had once been heavy and strong, his eyes dulled with fever.

Even the governor, who had seen Muhammad in Samarkand, did not recognize the wasted man in the mud-stained garments of a *hadji*, though Muhammad extended to him the emerald seal ring of Kharesmia. But Omar had proof of his master's identity and this proof he showed the Istarians, opening the seven chests that held the blue diamonds, the long ropes of pearls, the treasure of the Throne of Gold.

"The *Shah-im-shah* hath need of a boat—a boat with sails," he announced to the men of Istar, who were filled with wonder. "He goes upon a journey, out to sea."

It was Omar's plan that his master should take ship at the port of Istar and find sanctuary upon one of the islands of the Sea of the Ravens. The Horde that had followed him through the great cities of Islam and across the salt desert, and had trailed them into the mountain ranges would not be able to pursue upon the water.

"Thou art safe beyond all mischance, my Sultan," he said to the silent Muhammad. "I go to make ready a ship."

Restlessness gnawed at Muhammad, and he went to the roof of the *dar*, the governor's house that overlooked the shore. Here the *kadis* and the grandees brought him wine and mastic and good things to eat, and he gorged them, sitting in the sun. It was pleasant in the sun, and the breath of the sea was cold.

He thought that he would not go upon the boat for a while, though Omar sent a servant with word that all was ready. On the island would be no terraced roofs like this, no such throng of courtiers, or people in the streets who had come to stare at the Lion of Islam.

Muhammad looked back at the mountains that had caused him such suffering. The summits were hidden by clouds, but here the sun filled him with warmth, and the scent of the vineyards struck pleasantly into his nostrils.

Then came Omar, urging that the sail had been hoisted on the boat—a single-masted fisherman's skiff was the largest to be had—and his men were waiting to cast off. Muhammad was too tired to

want to move. Perhaps he had a little fever.

Surely Omar had sworn that he was safe, He would sleep for a while and then go to the *hammam* bath. The boat would still be there after another hour or two—

IT WAS late afternoon when Muhammad was roused from his stupor, and the throng on the roof had disappeared except for Omar who was gazing steadily toward the shore.

"My Sultan," he cried. "The hour of our going is at hand."

He pointed toward the shore, and the first thing that Muhammad noticed was that the Istarians were all hastening through the streets in the same direction. The wall was crowded with men holding drawn simitars, and the gates were closed.

On three sides the wall of Istar ran down to the sea, but on the fourth a long neck of land stretched back into the hills. And the road that ran from the shore along the peninsular to the gates of Istar was covered with rising dust. Through the dust could be seen masses of horsemen, moving at a gallop, plying their whips. From the mass uprose the horned standard of the Mongols.

Then did Muhammad know the fear of a hunted thing. His flushed forehead became damp and a mist spread before his eyes hiding the dust and the road. His heart quivered and leaped and in his nostrils was the scent of death.

"Come," repeated the minister, pulling at his sleeve. "The way to safety lies open."

SUBOTAI, the *Orluk*, did not draw rein as he galloped under the wall of Istar. He had cornered his quarry, but he had no means of laying siege to the last town of the Kharesmians.

The Muhammadans, accustomed to raids of the hills tribes, took this rush of the Horde for mere defiance, and expected the Mongols to draw back as swiftly as they had come. From the rampart rained down taunting shouts—arrows flashed and javelins flew among the horses.

Wheeling his white charger so abruptly that he almost crashed into Sir Hugh who rode behind him, the *Orluk* darted toward the nearest gate, throwing high his right arm.

The Horde, that had followed him as hounds press upon the leader, converged on the gate silently, and divided in two. Some three hundred bowmen began to trot back and forth a stone's throw from the wall, plying their shafts at the parapet on both sides the massive oak portal. The others did not rein in until their ponies were jammed up against the wall.

For a moment the missiles of the Kharesmians wrought havoc among the close-packed warriors. Then the arrows from the mounted archers cleared a space of defenders. The Muhammadan bowmen dropped with shafts through throat and brain—the shields of the spearmen availed them not.

"On the lances!" shouted Subotai, rising in his stirrups. "Cast the lariats! On!"

The warriors nearest the wall stood on their saddles, others dismounted and pushed their lances up to the parapet. The long shafts had been bound together near the head in pairs, and when the butts were planted on the ground, the points caught in the mortar. More lances were brought, and the Mongols who could not get near the wall at the point of attack drew long, pliable ropes from their saddle horns. These ropes, noosed at one end, they were accustomed to cast upon running horses, but now they whirled the loops over the crenels of the battlement and let the ropes hang for the eager hands of their comrades to grasp.

Climbing upon the shoulders of the nearest warriors, swarming up the lances, hauling themselves by the lariats, the Horde ascended the face of the wall—pierced by spears from above, shattered by mace and simitar, they fell back bleeding.

The shafts of the lances became slippery with blood, horses, mangled and trodden, screamed and reared. Like the surf rushing against high rocks, the tide

of men rose and sank, while the deep-throated shout of the Mongol onset rolled forth.

"*Hour-ra—hour-ra!*"

Subotai had launched his attack without waiting for more Mongols to come up, before the Istarians could recover from their surprize. Half his men lay dead around him, but a score of swordsmen had gained a footing on the wall and others swarmed after them.

"The gate!" cried the *Orluk*.

His men on the wall heard, and ran down the steps that led within. They fought their way to the gate, and a dozen of them turned savagely on the Muhammadans while two Mongols lifted down the massive iron bars from the sockets. The dozen had dwindled to five when the gates swung open.

Meanwhile Subotai had called in his bowman who had suffered little. The *Orluk* reined his charger against the oak portal, listening to the struggle within, and when the bars were down the weight of a hundred horses forced open the gates.

When his detachment was in the streets, Subotai called a score of riders to him, leaving the others to hold the gate. On the distant shore he had seen the first of the heavy cavalry of the Horde coming up at a gallop.

His eyes glowed with a greenish light as he watched the throngs of disordered Muhammadans, and his thin lips smiled as he gathered up his reins, speaking to Sir Hugh for the first time.

"*Hei!* The fox is in his hole, and we will dig him out."

When Arslan had interpreted this, the crusader shook his head.

"Thou wilt not find him."

Subotai pulled the battle ax from his girdle, and his white teeth ground together. "We found his trail. He is here. Look!" He pointed to a body lying near the fore feet of his charger, a tall Kharesmian with a haggard face and henna-stained beard, an arrow buried deep under his heart. "The jackal lurked by the gate."

Sir Hugh recognized Omar, the minister of the Throne of Gold.

"Thou wilt not find him," he said again, "because he will flee in a boat."

When this was explained to the Mongol he muttered under his breath and struck his horse with the flat of the ax. Lifting his arm, he called to the detachment that had drawn up around him to shield him from the arrows of the Muhammadans.

They galloped through the street that emptied before them, and swept into narrow alleys, crashing over merchants' stalls, leaping ditches and skirting garden walls until they emerged into an almost deserted alley that led down to the end of the promontory upon which the city stood.

Here was neither wall nor harbor. A stone watch tower rose from a huddle of fishing huts. And here, at the end of a wooden jetty, a sailing skiff was moving out from the shore.

Three or four men were in the skiff—one hauling up the stone that had served as anchor, another making fast the sheets of the square sail. Crouched in the belly of the boat was Muhammad.

The Mongols, urging their weary horses toward the jetty, saw him—saw that two of his companions wore armor and the *khalats* of nobles. Then a puff of wind caught the boat, the sail filled, and it began to move more swiftly, rising in the swells.

The wind was off shore, and the skiff heeled over as a Kharesmian took the steering oar and headed out to sea. The first Mongols reached the jetty and reined in, reaching for their bows and sending arrows flashing toward the fishing craft.

Some of the shafts struck the skiff but in a moment more it was out of range. Subotai turned and spoke a single word to his warriors.

One after another, the Mongols leaped their ponies into the water. Slipping from the saddles, they clutched the horses' tails, striking at the heads of the animals that tried to turn back to shore.

Horses and men moved steadily after

the skiff that was drawing off slowly under the light breeze. Sir Hugh, breathing deeply, could not take his eyes from them.

"One has gone!" he muttered to himself after a moment.

And he wondered whether the followers of Muhammad would have jumped into the sea at the command of their lord. Knowing that the beasts must be tired, he waited for them to turn back.

After a while he knew they would not come back. Only five or six were visible, on the breast of the swell, following the skiff. They seemed to be closer to it.

"*Akh!*" cried Arslan, pointing.

One horse and the head of a warrior was still to be seen and the watchers on the jetty strained their eyes into the twilight. Subotai lifted his head, and drew breath between clenched teeth.

"*Ahatoul*"

He raised his hand and let it fall.

The solitary rider had disappeared under the swell and only the skiff was visible moving sluggishly into the gathering mists. For a while the *Orluk* was sunk in meditation, paying no heed to the tumult in the streets behind him where the Horde was seeking him earnestly.

For an entire summer he had ridden in the track of the Shah, without rest. He had fought times without number; he had stormed cities and galloped through unknown kingdoms to hunt down the lord of Islam, and now he was confronted by the sea. It was the first time this nomad of the Gobi had beheld the sea and the boats that went forth upon it.

He turned back from the jetty and went to look at the few fishing craft drawn up on the beach.

"Will these go over the water like that yonder?" he asked Sir Hugh and Arslan interpreted.

"Nay," the crusader pointed out, "the bottoms have been stove in. They would sink."

Subotai looked up. Muhammad's skiff had changed its course and was lost to sight.

"It leaves no trail. How can it be followed?"

"Along the shore," the crusader suggested, "there must be other boats. The wind is dying and Muhammad is still near."

The Mongol turned on him swiftly.

"Canst make a boat follow, on the water?"

"Aye."

"Take a *chambul* of bowmen. Go, and seek!"

Wheeling his charger, the *Orluk* galloped back to the fighting, and presently Arslan who had accompanied him reappeared with some thirty warriors, saying that they were under the orders of the crusader.

IT WAS utterly dark on the shore of the Sea of the Ravens. Only on the promontory of Istar did lights gleam and, from the quiet that prevailed, Sir Hugh judged that Subotai was master of the town.

He had sought through the dusk for fishing villages, and had found only abandoned huts in the forest of rushes. Arslan he had sent back for lanterns, and the Mongols he had divided, to search the shore in both directions. They had gone off like hunting dogs, questing in the shadows and—though he reined in and listened—he could no longer hear them splashing in the mud near him. His pony was played out, and he dismounted, to sit and wait for lights.

Muhammad had escaped, that was certain. But Sir Hugh wanted a boat for his own use. If he could get food and water from the Mongols at Istar he meant to embark on this sea—

Raising his head, he listened, thinking that the archers were coming back. A slight sound came over the water, a bird rising from the rushes, or the whisper of the swell.

Then he heard a creaking of wood, and a murmur of voices. Men splashed through the shallows on foot, making as little noise as possible. The crusader sat where he was, until the shore was quiet, and then rose to investigate. Somewhere the faint creaking and slapping

persisted, and presently he made out a vague shape against the stars—a shape that moved to and fro and changed as he watched.

Toward it he made his way, going knee-deep into water, and parting the rushes that rose over his head. His hand, outthrust, touched solid wood, and he knew that the thing that had come between him and the stars was a sail. He could feel it now and see the outline of the mast. A reek of foul water and rotten fish was in his nostrils and a man rose up beside him from the bottom of the boat.

"*Wallahi!*" The man had stooped to peer at Sir Hugh, and the crusader gripped his arm. "Who art thou?"

"Death," whispered the knight, "unless thou keep silence."

As his eyes searched the boat he made out, in the starlight, another figure outstretched. Still gripping his captive, he bent down and drew in his breath sharply. From a bloodless countenance the dark and sightless eyes of Muhammad seemed in that illusory light to seek his.

"Aye," said the man he held, "that was the Shah. It was written that he should not go upon the sea."

Sir Hugh touched the head of the prone figure. It was cold, and the hands and feet moved idly with the swinging of the skiff. And yet the garments were not disordered, nor could he make out any wound.

"What befell the Shah?" he asked.

The solitary occupant of the boat sighed, and answered with the resignation of his race.

"It was the hour appointed. No Mongol arrow touched him. A fever was in him, and perhaps fear weighed upon his spirit. When he watched the horsemen jump into the sea after him he said no word. After the hour of the *namaz gar* he died. Who art thou?"

When Sir Hugh remained silent, the Muhammadan went on sadly.

"This also was to come upon our head. Why should we go to the island? *He* lacked even a shroud for burial. We came back—to dig his grave in his own land."

Beside the body of the Shah, Sir Hugh had seen half a dozen chests, and the one nearest the servant of the Shah was open. Even in the starlight the gleam of precious stones and the white shape of pearls was unmistakable. And the cover of the open chest had been split and pried off with an ax.

He looked around and thought he saw the ax near the slippered feet of the Muhammadan who had remained to guard the body and the treasure when his comrades went to the shore—who had been taken unaware by the quiet approach of the crusader.

"Not in his own land," Sir Hugh made answer, "for the Mongols have taken Istar."

"We did not know."

The lean arm of Muhammad's follower grew tense under his grasp, and the knight reflected that these men had found themselves masters of the wealth in the chests. They had put back to shore perhaps to bury Muhammad, but undoubtedly to seek for horses. They had left a man to watch the boat, hidden in the darkness and the rushes. Sir Hugh had heard the others go past him after the boat reached the shore.

"Who art thou?" the man asked for the third time.

"The foe of thy Shah!"

Pulling the Muhammadan toward him, Sir Hugh caught the man in his arms and cast him among the rushes. Then he thrust the skiff out into deeper water, wading beside it until it drifted clear of the rushes. With a final shove he hauled himself in over the bow and went to the steering oar.

Working this oar back and forth he turned the bow of the skiff to breast the swell. There was a little air stirring, and he sought for the sheets, making them fast to the thwarts. Then he sat down with the steering oar in his hand, to think.

Of all those who had gathered at the caravanserai in the salt desert nearly a month ago, he alone had lived to reach the Sea of the Ravens. Mir Beg had died at his hand, Omar had been struck down by

a Mongol arrow, and the Shah had perished from exhaustion and fear.

The head of Muhammad, rocking with the motion of the skiff, rested between his feet. The precious stones of the Shah were at his side, but Muhammad was beyond need of them.

Sir Hugh counted the chests. There were seven, and if all held such jewels, the treasure of an empire was in this skiff—reeking of fish, on the shore of an unknown sea.

That he himself was still alive, he owed to the Mongols. And he thought of his companions of the caravan track, of the reckless Khalil, the wise Kutsai and the Eagle. He thought about Subotai, the Eagle, for a long time.

He had his boat at last—he was beyond the Muhammadan frontier—but he had pledged allegiance to the Mongol lords. After he had considered all these things, Sir Hugh took up the oar and headed the skiff toward the lights of Istar.

WHEN he came within hail of the jetty, the crusader loosed the sheets and drifted in to the shore where some Mongol warriors stood guard with blazing torches. Seeing the skiff, they came to the water's edge and looked at him silently, as he poled the fishing craft in.

"*Subotai Bahadur!*" he called to them, and one departed at a run.

Meanwhile the crusader beached his boat and stepped out on the sand. The warriors were talking among themselves, watching him, until horses appeared in the nearest street and the *Orluk* with his officers and the courier Arslan came down to the water. Subotai pulled in his charger at the bow of the skiff and observed the body within. He bent down in the saddle and studied it, then spoke curtly to Arslan.

"What man is this, O Nazarene?" asked the courier.

"Muhammad Shah."

Subotai's blue eyes glowed, and he raised his right hand, his great fist clenched.

"Proof!"

Sir Hugh lifted the Kharesmian's arm, already growing rigid, and pointed to the signet ring. Then he picked up the opened chest and dumped out on the sand a glittering flood of precious stones. Subotai swung down from the stirrup, glanced casually at the jewels of the Throne of Gold and put his hand on the face of the dead man.

"Life is gone from him." He struck the hilt of his saber with an open palm, as if sheathing the weapon. "*Hai*—the hunt is at an end."

The warriors who pressed about him murmured assent, their dark faces triumphant, and from a group of Istarians who had drawn near there rose a low wail of lamentation.

"His treasure availed him not," growled the Mongol leader. "He died without a weapon in his hand, and in a boat. Better for him if he had never gone upon the sea." Abruptly he turned to Sir Hugh. "And thou—what dost thou ask of me?"

"My horse Kutb. He will come up with the caravans."

"And what more?"

"Freedom, to choose my road. I go to seek an enemy in the western world."

Subotai folded his arms on his broad chest and fell silent. When he spoke it was to the nearest officer, who dismounted swiftly and stood by the stirrup of his mount, a black mare. Then the *Orluk* asked a question of the crusader.

"Why didst thou come back from the sea?"

"My life I owed to the Horde and now I have paid the debt."

When Arslan had interpreted this, Subotai made response in his slow drawl.

"*Hai*, thou art mighty in battle. Mine eyes beheld this. Thou hast kept the saddle with a rider of the *yamkh*, untiring as a hawk. Thou art without fear, since thou hast gone alone upon the sea. Come then, to my house as a guest."

Swinging himself into the saddle of the officer's mare, the Mongol conqueror motioned to Sir Hugh to mount his own charger.

"*Hai,* the command of the great Khan was that I should go into the western world when Muhammad was slain. Come thou with me and we will open up a path for our horses."

Sir Hugh picked up his rein, and made his decision without hesitation.

"Aye, so."

Before turning back to the city the leader of the Horde glanced a last time at the body in the skiff that grated against the stones of the beach. Something like a smile touched his hard lips.

"Kutsai would have kept thee, to make marks on his map; but I shall take thee, to shape a new world."

Looking About

OUR magazine blossomed forth into a new type dress with its last issue and that very blossoming forth entailed rushes and delays that kept me from speaking of it in that issue. However, it should speak for itself, and we hope you like it as much as we in the office do. The new type is the same size, or "point," as before, but with a different "face" and with a minutely greater space around each letter, making for greater clearness and ease in reading.

Another improvement in this issue. All its art work is done by Rockwell Kent, who needs no introduction, and we are glad to say that his hand will be seen on our pages for some issues to come.

As stated when we first announced the "new" *Adventure*, we mean to keep right on making it better and better with each issue. That can't be done without experiment. The only dead sure way to find out whether a new idea is really sound is to give it actual trial and then to listen to the reactions and comments of you for whom we make the magazine—its readers.

Among other things, we're just now working out ways of using our Department space to better advantage. For example, smaller headings, giving more space for reading matter. Also, condensation of the list of sections covered by our "Ask Adventure" experts. And perhaps running "Travel" once a month—every other issue—giving it enlarged space when we do run it.

And always we want your comments and advice on any changes we make.

AS MANY of you know I've always tried to answer personally all letters addressed to me by name. Not to do so seems as discourteous as failing to speak in return when some one speaks to you. I haven't always been able to live up to these principles and once or twice, as office work grew in volume through the years, I've had to state at Camp-Fire that I'd have to give up the attempt, or at least answer very briefly.

Even so my correspondence has grown until I'm writing five or six thousand letters a year. Many of the letters that come in are hand-written and take longer to read than to answer. Strange as it may seem, an editor has many things to do besides writing letters and reading stories. This past summer the doctor proved to me conclusively that I could not any longer carry all these things added together. Health all right, but worn out from overwork. That was that.

The only remedy was to reorganize the staff so that others could take on what I had to let go. Various subjects were placed under the direction of particular editors, including, of course, the correspondence pertaining to them. The net result is that they are handled more quickly and efficiently than when I struggled to find time for them, but I've had to give up to some degree the direct personal touch that has humanized sixteen years of the same job and brought me many personal friendships.

But let it be plain that, though others of the staff may answer letters I'd like to answer, nothing whatever has happened to my attitude toward those who read or help make our magazine. The older readers know that the antique conception of an editor as a being too dignified and so forth to meet his readers as humans just like himself has never held for *Adventure*. I've merely accumulated, with help, enough horse sense to realize I can't do any more than I can do and that there are only twenty-four hours in a day.

And be very sure that every suggestion in one of your letters is being just as carefully considered as ever it was in the past and that it reaches me through others just as surely as it used to reach me direct.

A. S. H.

The Camp-Fire

A free-to-all Meeting-Place *for* Readers, Writers *and* Adventurers

OUR *Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.*

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit *of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.*

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

FROM our old friend H. Cody Blake some questions concerning the man from whom he got his middle name:

Brooklyn, New York.

When was Cody born? You may remember the place was given in "Camp-Fire" as near Leavenworth, Kansas, and Mr. Guest—if I recall the name—picked it up. At the time,when the'correction appeared I wrote you and you forwarded my letter.

I may have more concerning Cody than any one person in the East. I possess photos of him which none of the women of the family have (and there are only women living). One when about 4 years old, one 12, and one when he got his name, Buffalo Bill, 1867-68, in scout rig, and one when 20 years old with his hat off (an unusual photo). These I own in copyright. I own his original scout clothes, and, strange as it may seem, have, as I wrote you, his birth-date in his own writing. I find in many of the books, which should give his birth 1846, 1845 instead, and what's stranger is, Cody gives it 1845 himself in three books by himself.

Second question is: What is the correct spelling of the name of Wild Bill who was killed August 2, 1876. What was his name? In this case I wrote you at the time "Camp-Fire" reprinted an item in Boston *Post* and called to your attention to what *seemed* to be an error. Was it? Why I think it may have been the correct name is I have since found it given as Hitchcock by such authorities as Ned Buntline who "brought out Cody," and in Buntline's book on Cody he "stars" the name Hitchcock and the reference reads that this was Bill's correct name.

Third question: Did Cody in single-hand combat kill "Yellow Hand" with the Injuns on one side and Merrit's 5th Cav. on the other as spectators in June, 1876, or under any other circumstances or at any date? And before it's answered, I stand up in the Camp-Fire circle to lock horns with any comrade affirming he did.

It's time some of this Cody-Custer-Fred Haus*et al* dope was roped and thrown and hog tied.—H. CODY BLAKE.

P. S.—Even if I am named after the old scout, in imitation of him I'm always ready for a scrap. He preferred guns to my preferring ink.

NOW if I followed our custom, before passing it on to you, I'd send to Mr. Shaw of "A. A." the following from Arthur O. Friel of our writers' brigade taking issue with our statement of his and get Mr. Shaw's reply to appear along with it. But this has been one of the days when everything we tried to do has been held up by some unforeseen hitch and we've reached the stage where we're ready to break bounds or precedents or rules or anything in order to get the work through in time. Also, Mr. Shaw's record in the past has been so sound and good that he can afford a bit of a slip once in a while—and, as Mr. Friel suggests, he may not have meant to say what he seemed to say. So we'll pass no judgment until he's seen this and has had time to reply if he wishes.

Mr. Friel begins his letter with some very pleasant congratulations on our magazine's new form and general development. We omit from the "Camp-Fire" version, as usual, these good words about our magazine. But I admit I'm sorely tempted these days. We here in the office are living in a pleasant glow from the congratulations pouring in. It doesn't seem right not to pass them on to all Camp-Fire—particularly since these very congratulations are proof of how widespread and sincere is the feeling that makes its readers call *Adventure* "our" magazine and that would make them rejoice as we do in these many recognitions. On the other hand, one of the things most of us like about our magazine is that it keeps "Camp-Fire" pretty free from praises of it. So there you are!

And here is Arthur O. Friel:

Brooklyn, New York.

Here's to her! As luck will have it, though, I find in this first new issue the first statement that has ever moved me to question something said by an "A. A." editor. That is Mr. Shaw's reply in "Camp-Fire" to a query regarding Brazil:

"There are certain places that have not been explored by white men. They are in the headwaters of the tributaries of the Amazon. Most of that district has very largely been photographed by Walter Hinton of the Hamilton-Rice expedition."

ALL excellent except the last sentence. Some sort of slip must have happened in that one. I doubt that Mr. Shaw meant to say just what he seems to say—namely, that most of the country at the headwaters of the Amazon tributaries had been photographed by Hinton. That would take in a goshawful lot of territory. What Hinton did was to fly up to and over the headwaters of *one* tributary of one tributary of one tributary of the Amazon. That is, of the Rio Uraricuera, which flows into the Rio Branco, which in turn flows into the big Rio

Negro, which enters the Amazon below Manaos. That leaves one whale of a lot of tributaries unphotographed and unvisited. In fact, the headwaters of the Negro are far beyond the Branco; and the Branco itself has other headwaters besides the Uraricuera—such as the Cotinga, Mahu and Tacutu. As for the other tributaries of the Amazon, their headwaters are so numerous that no man, unless he lived to the age of Methuselah, could visit half of them.

Not that I want to belittle the achievements of Hinton. Absolutely not. There are —— few men to whom I will touch my hat, but I take that hat away off to that bird, and throw in a brace of kowtows for good measure. The work he did up there in the jungle, flying a little bug of a plane with a fatal crash just about one eyelash away from him every minute, was the kind that calls for super backbone. But the point is that his work was confined to the Negro-Branco-Uraricuera tributary system; a fine large piece of territory, true enough, but only one out of the huge network of tributaries in the Amazon basin. He himself claims no more than that, nor does Captain Stevens, who flew with him and took the photographs. I have read both their stories of the trip, and also heard the lecture before the American Geographical Society by Dr. Hamilton Rice, leader of the expedition.

DOCTOR RICE himself has explored widely north of the Amazon—the rivers Napo, Uaupes, Negro, Casiquiare, part of the upper Orinoco, Branco, and so on. Recently he has been trying to find the source of the Orinoco, which no man has yet been able to reach because of the hostility of the savage Guaharibos. About half a dozen years ago he reached the Raudal Guaharibo (having reached the upper Orinoco via Brazil) but, like everybody else who has tried to pass that point, was attacked by the savages and driven out; had to do some shooting to get clear.

This latest trip, on which he took Hinton and Stevens and others along, was meant to attack the same problem from another direction—east of the divide from which the Orinoco flows. There's an old tradition that the Orinoco and the Uraricuera (or Parima) start from the same place—a lake in the mountains. So he and his outfit went up the Branco and the Uraricuera to see if this was so. It wasn't. Hinton, in his plane, found no connection between the two rivers, and no lake. He lacked gas enough to cross the mountains and learn where the Orinoco did start. So the source of that tough old Orinoco is still hidden.

All of which is beside the point, said point being that there are a whole lot of tributary headwaters in Brazil which haven't been explored or photographed by any white man. With everything else said by Mr. Shaw I agree most heartily. Maybe what he really said on that point was all right too, but it got gummed up in publication.

Anyway, here's to our sixteen-year-old flapper making her début in the new dress.—FRIEL.

ANOTHER bit of testimony on the effects of salmon as dog food, originally brought up for discussion by an incident in one of our stories:

Tofino, Vancouver Island, B. C., Canada.

I feel compelled to again bother you and as usual it is because I am always keen on seeing Camp-Fire right.

Re Dogs Eating Salmon. On the B. C. coast here, our dogs and those of the Indians roam the beaches and fairly live on salmon but I notice they prefer it in the semi-decayed state. This is true of all this coast and Alaska, I believe. I have noticed no ill effects except those connected with gorging, and have never heard of a dog dying from the effects.—B. H. SYMNS.

HERE is the tail end of a letter from Captain Kingsley Moses, bearing on his story in this issue. Also an advertisement of 1786, by John Fairfax, overseer to George Washington.

New York City.

The mule is, of course, the offspring of a mare and a jack. The reverse is a hinny. The burro is pure ass.

Along this line I send you a copy of the interesting advertisement of George Washington; for it was no less than he who introduced mule-breeding to America.—KINGSLEY MOSES.

Advertisement.—Royal Gift—A Jack Ass of the first race in the Kingdom of Spain will cover mares and jennies (she asses) at Mount Vernon the ensuing spring. The first for ten, the latter for fifteen pounds the season. Royal Gift is four years old, is between 14½ and 15 hands high, and will grow, it is said, until he is twenty or twenty-five years of age. He is very bony and stout made, of a dark color with light belly and legs. The advantages, which are many, to be derived from the propagation of asses from this animal (the first of the kind that was ever in North America), and the usefulness of mules bred from a Jack of this size, either for the road or team, are well known to those who are acquainted with this mongrel race. For the information of those who are not, it may be enough to add that their great strength, longevity, hardiness and cheap support give them a preference of horses that is scarcely to be imagined. As the Jack is young, and the General has many mares of his own to put to him, a limited number only will be received from others, and these entered in the order they are offered. Letters directed to the subscriber, by post or otherwise, under cover to the General, will be entered on the day they are received, till the number is completed, of which the writers shall be informed to prevent trouble or expense to them.

JOHN FAIRFAX, Overseer.

Mount Vernon,
February 23, 1786.

HERE are the two "Aztecs" who were once before presented to Camp-Fire. I'm sorry I misconstrued one statement in Mr. McDonald's former letter.

Chicago, Illinois.

I notice from the last issue you have published my letter *re* the origin of the two Aztecs shown in Scotland in the early eighties. In your introduction to the letter, you have misunderstood my meaning when I stated that I did not see the man. To make the matter clear, I should have said that I did not see the husband but only the wife who was left in charge of the two "Aztecs," male and female, both of whom I saw and took notice of their singular hair.

In a little town, where there were men who had sailed the Seven Seas, old-time retired skippers, retired station men from Queensland and New South Wales, Australia, tea-plantation men from Ceylon and Assam, traders from over Africa and the East generally, with a sprinkling of mining and civil engineers, it was possible that he had good company and, if he were a member of the older fraternal orders, he had landed on both feet.

From appearances, I would say they (the couple of show people) were of the better type, and the Aztecs were well groomed and well trained and well fed.

I have no doubt but what these two were really what was claimed by the show people, *viz* "Aztecs"—or the "heron people," from the resemblance of their hair to the crest feather tuft of the heron—who came from the north, from the caves and waters, with traditions of a cold age which drove them south, warriors, for hire, and a fierce, dominant, ruthless people.

WHY I emphasized the fact that I did not see the man or husband was that I wanted ,to know from which part of Central America these people were abducted—whether from Honduras, Guatemala, Yucatan or from the northern State of Jalisco. It would have guided me in some research work I had made some time previous.

There were quite a number of ladies in the hall, and, when they began to question the show lady, I hadn't a chance in two hours to get a word in edgeways.

That explains how I made the fact of not seeing the husband so emphatic.

Business took me away before I had a chance to call again, much to my regret.

So make matters right.—JOHN MCDONALD.

Being no authority on Aztecs, but inclined to doubt the authenticity of the two in question, I asked John Murray Reynolds, of our writers' brigade and of an archeological and anthropological turn of mind, to give his opinion, which he kindly did:

Brooklyn, New York.

There is a letter in "Camp Fire" of September 8th describing a pair of so called Aztecs alleged to have been found in Central America about 1880. Your correspondent uses the fact that they were not Amerindian in appearance for drawing certain conclusions about the Aztec nation as a whole.

FRANKLY, I think the only conclusion that can be drawn from the evidence is that those people were a fake. The idea of a pair of Aztecs being found at that late date is too fantastic, and would have attracted too much scientific attention to have been forgotten if it had been really true. In other words, I think that the promoter and his wife picked up a pair of ordinary African natives, put some fancy clothes on them, concocted a legend, and called them Aztecs. They then started out to make some money—and doubtless succeeded. Of course, I did not see the people myself but that is certainly the way it sounds.

The fact that the two alleged Aztecs had frizzy hair of a negroid type and were distinctly non-Indian in appearance only supports my contention that they were purely African, and nothing else.

The evidence is overwhelmingly and indisputably to the effect that the Aztecs were an offshoot of the Maya nation who become dominant when decadence weakened the Mayas. An exact parallel is the case of Assyria and Babylonia. There may be authorities who differ from this view, but I do not know of any.

GIVEN one race of people spread over an area as large and varied as this hemisphere, only time is needed to produce a variety of modes of living. In the forests of the east arose the misunderstood and chivalrous Iroquois—dwellers in the "Long House." To the west the prairies produced a somewhat lower, nomadic type. In the southern swamps the Seminoles led another kind of life. In the deserts of the southwest life was harder, and there we find first the cliff dwellers and later the Hopi.

The history of civilization as a whole shows that one particular kind of locale has always been particularly favorable to the development of civilizations—a tropical or semi-tropical aridity with possibilities of not too difficult irrigation. The reasons for this are too long to go into at this time, but it seems to be the case. Egypt was that way, and Mesopotamia. Also probably the equally ancient kingdom of Elam. These were the places where civilization in a real sense first developed, and the same general sort of conditions led to the development of civilization in Mexico and in Peru.

Incidentally, the range of the Amerindian race is from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, not merely from Slave Lake to Patagonia as stated by Mr. McDonald.—JOHN MURRAY REYNOLDS.

IN CONNECTION with his story in this issue, a few words from Henry R. Peterson.

Pomona, California.

The corbina, or surf, is well known to beach fishermen on the Pacific coast. This fish, gamey and fastidious, the golden trout of the shore, is well worth the efforts of the sportsman. When hooked it will put up a splendid fight and will do everything except stand on its head to escape. During the season, rock worms and sand crabs are in great demand for corbina bait. Packages of bait are reserved days ahead by enthusiastic surf fishermen, and there is a great deal of competition for the largest fish. "Scavengers of the Surf" is based on an actual case of water pollution, near Alamitos Bay, California.—HARRY R. PETERSON.

FOR the second time at the same meeting I break Camp-Fire custom to print praise of our stories and our writers. It does not seem fair always to suppress praise when merited. Our writers merit it in this case.

Dorchester Center, Boston.

Dear Camp-Fire Friends: After listening to your splendid contributions for nearly ten years, I am taken with a sudden impulse to say a word of commendation for the ideals championed by *Adventure* in this day of unscrupulous fiction. The increasing number of arraignments by reviewers of American fiction certainly makes one pause to wonder if the worst enemies of Society have really been excluded from our popular literature. These charges being of variable weight and sincerity, it is necessary to distinguish which are the wails of cranks and which are the honest protests of such men and women as the Camp-Fire has always welcomed.

IT IS true that a frightful amount of careless writing gets into the mental food-supply of American readers. That is bad enough, since it is this food-supply which determines the character of citizens, for better or worse; we are pre-eminently a reading people. As we think, we live. But something more serious than carelessness threatens us if the corruption of our literary commissariat continues:—a diseased national psyche.

It is the penchant of many popular writers to seek for their characters painful complexes, abnormal motives and unwholesome reactions, all the more dangerous because camouflaged under conventional morality. Degradation and mental distress—two subjects which should be handled only by the most skillful and sincere—are made the *pièce de résistance* of every slap-dash sensation story that goes to press; and, strangely enough, these unwholesome situations are quite often made attractive, especially to immature minds. I am not referring to the justly condemned "dime novel" but to fiction which frequently commands the highest prices and is to be found in our "best homes." There is no need to cite examples, even if that were advisable; the dullest short-story fan can name a-plenty. But the danger of this type of fiction to our national morale and to the good citizenship which depends upon it can hardly be over-stressed.

IT IS to the everlasting credit of *Adventure* that not only have its contributors been masters of their art, but they have cleansed their thoughts in the great, sweet winds of the open places, where man greets man in honest fellowship and woman is honored because she is worthy. Their stories are far from tame, rivaling the most absorbing midnight "thriller" for suspense and vivid action. Yet they have always abhorred that which is morbidly suggestive, they have given honor where honor was due, and they have done more for the cause of true manhood than have many who proclaim themselves public benefactors. May their tribe increase!—GAYLORD DUBOIS.

FROM five years deep in our cache comes this letter concerning "you-all," singular.

In those days we used to accept initials as sufficient signature to a "Camp-Fire" letter far oftener than we do now. Which last is not at all, except in certain obvious cases that do not include the average reader.

In the current number of our magazine there is a letter in "Camp-Fire" signed "D. W. C." In the second paragraph of this letter I find—"Sometimes a writer of Western or Southern stories has his characters use the expression 'you-all,' and frequently they use it in the singular number, which is *never done in reality*."

I hope Mr. C. is a good sport, because I am going to disagree with him. If I had a dollar for every time I myself have used "you-all" in the singular number I would be rich. And I am not a Southerner, though I would want to be if I weren't a Northerner.

MY MOTHER'S people are Kentuckians and most of them use the expression "you-all," both as singular and plural. I have heard "you-all" used in all parts of the country, most often as a plural, however. Yet often enough as a singular. I found the expression in Texas, Washington and Ohio. I knew a native of Pittsfield, Mass., who used the expression. I knew a gatekeeper at the Cortlandt Street ferry, New York, who used the expression singular. He was originally from Memphis. I met a man at Ft. Smith, in Mr. C.'s own State, who used the expression singular. "Will

you-all have a drink?" he said to me. There wasn't a soul with me, and when we went down to the bar I didn't see any one else come with us.

That the expression is generally used as plural I admit, but that it is never used singular is an error. Cowboys are much given to it in certain sections.

"Hadn't oughter," is native to Kentucky and Tennessee; at least in the hills. As for "crick" for creek—I wish somebody would cite me a State in this country where it isn't used. And by natives at that.—G. A. WELLS.

A FEW words from Captain Dingle concerning the real historical man behind the name of the central character of his story in this issue:

Sven Dufva was a hero of the war of 1808, a Finn fighting for liberty against Russia. He actually was so slow of thought and action that he was almost hopeless as a soldier. No drill could ever make him grasp an order smartly. Often he only got the significance of an order when his comrades were already well away in obedience to another. He was the butt of the army.

His moment came when his company retreated from the defense of a footbridge. The Russians were at the other end in overwhelming force. Sven Dufva never grasped the order to retreat until the enemy were upon him. He stood fighting alone, and fought stubbornly, holding back the Russians until his own commander seized the miraculous opportunity and rallied his men, returning to the attack and carrying the bridge for good and all. Sven Dufva fell shot through the head in the moment of victory.

That part of "Hellbuster Doova" at least is true. —CAPTAIN DINGLE.

A LETTER correcting a statement made at an earlier Camp-Fire. Incidentally, the writer says the West Virginia anti-weapon law hasn't changed conditions. Neither has New York's, unless it has made them worse.

Has any other anti-weapon law done what its advocates claimed it would do? Yet there are people all over the country working their hardest for anti-weapon laws covering the whole country, fondly believing that crime will thereby be controlled. The facts of anti-weapon laws in actual practise don't mean anything to these well-meaning theorists. They see a chance to solve the nation's crime problem by passing another law. It isn't so easily solved.

Albuquerque, New Mexico.

In *Adventure*, dated February 28, 1926, I note a letter in "Camp-Fire" from E. E. Harriman of Los Angeles, California, in which he says, "They passed a law in West Virginia against gun-toting and requiring a bond of $15,000 of any one desiring to pocket a gun, resulting in officers going unarmed, etc."

Mr. Harriman should be more careful of making such statements without first being sure of their accuracy.

West Virginia has a law requiring one who desires to carry weapons to secure a license—but the bond required is only $3,500 and this law does not apply to law officers, except special officers employed by corporations. This law has been in effect for a good many years and I don't see that it has changed conditions one way or the other. It is no trouble to secure a license if one desires it. Any resident of the State of good character may secure same by applying to the Circuit Court Judge and giving the required bond.

Will you kindly inform Mr. Harriman of the facts of the matter?—W. H. SMYTH.

WHEN we think of the great conquerors of history few of us include Genghis Khan in the number. Probably this is chiefly because most of us know really very little about him. It is rather startling to have him ranked above Cæsar and Napoleon. But read what Harold Lamb has to say about him in reviewing the historical material drawn on for his novelette in this issue. Mr. Lamb's knowledge of things Mongolian, of Asia in the Middle Ages, has stood our test for too many years for us to take issue with him in this field unless we have very definite and solid facts to stand on.

The march of ninety degrees of longtitude was made by the Mongol Horde of Genghis Khan early in the thirteenth century. It was the most remarkable feat performed by cavalry in all history.

The map shows the route followed, roughly. Starting from the northern Gobi, two hundred thousand horsemen crossed the ranges of Central Asia, passed over the Kizil Kum desert, took Samarkand and Bokhara, went through the Hindu Kush and looked in on Delhi, turned west over modern Afghanistan and northern Persia, including the great salt desert, continued on west into a corner of Armenia, turned north and passed through the Caucasus, entered the Russian steppes, swung down into the Crimea on the Black Sea, and into Europe as far as the Dnieper river, then returned to the Gobi through the heart of what is now the Russian empire—or is it a republic?

THIS trek of a wandering army is remarkable in itself. But every foot of the route lay through hostile country, and battles were the order of the day. Moreover the march from Afghanistan westward was made by two of the Mongul Eagles, or marshals—Subotai and Chepe Noyon—with two and a half *tumans*. A *tuman*, or cavalry division, numbered ten thousand. So the two Eagles could not have had more than twenty-five thousand.

They were ordered by Genghis Khan to set out in pursuit of the Muhammadan emperor, to ride him down wherever he went in the world and not to come back until he was dead. They did it.

And this man-hunt of an emperor is without parallel in human annals. Muhammad, fleeing before the Mongols, had all the Moslem empires of the west for sanctuary—Kharesmia, Persia, Saracen and Seljuke, the Mameluks of Egypt. He could, and did, throw armies in the path of the pursuing Mongol divisions; he could pass through great cities that they must besiege or skirt. He disguised himself, slept at night in different tents.

He would start off on one road and divide his followers, turning off in a different direction himself. He had resources—the bulk of his treasure with him—and devoted men to serve him.

At Nisapur he organized a hunt on a large scale and stole away with a few warriors. But the hard-riding Mongols were never off the scent for long. They trailed him through half a dozen kingdoms, headed him off from Bagdad, and then from the refuge of the Caucasus.

The final scene, where the Mongols came up with the fleeing emperor on the Caspian shore is not a bit of the author's imagination. It is given, as in the story, by al-Nisavi, the chronicler.

AND the main events of the story took place as related. Muhammad, Omar, Subotai and Ye Lui Kutsai are characters of history. It is not certain whether Kutsai accompanied Subotai. In reality, Muhammad died on his island instead of in the boat. The chronicler says of him "In spite of vast riches, the sultan was so poverty-ridden at his death that he was buried in a shirt of one of his followers for a shroud."

The Sea of the Ravens is the Caspian Sea. It was christened *Kouzgoun Denguiz* or Sea of the Crows by, I think, the Huns or Alans.

ONE thing calls for explanation. The story describes the Mongol Horde as it existed then. Most of us have been given the impression that the Mongols were a migratory people, vast multitudes moving over and conquering half the world. Also that the Mongols were Chinese.

They were no more Chinese than the Arabs are Turks. They conquered thirteenth century China, which is named Cathay in the story. The Horde was a disciplined body of cavalry that could go anywhere.

It was untiring. As for its rate of progress, Subotai once galloped with twenty thousand men two hundred and ninety kilometers in a little less than three days.

It was handled with all the genius of Genghis Khan and the veteran Eagles who had waged war for a generation in Cathay. The victories gained by the Mongols—invariably, swiftly, and with terrible losses to the foes—seem incredible until we reflect that the armies of the middle ages were accustomed to fight in compact masses, either standing their ground or charging. The Mongols maneuvered in detached divisions, and their bows outranged anything opposed to them.

A Christian observer reports that the arrows of the Mongols were so devastating that they rarely had to use their side arms in a battle. The trick—and Subotai was a master of strategy—played on the Kharesmians was the same that annihilated the grand dukes of Russia and their host a year or so later.

THERE is so much bunk in history about Genghis Khan that we ought to know the truth. Demetrious Boulger is speaking:

"The area of his conquests was more vast than was the case with any other conqueror. Not a country from the Black to the China sea escaped the tramp of the Mongol horsemen. . . . Perhaps the most important result was the arrest of the Mohammedan career in Central Asia—and this is not as fully recognized as it should be.

"Genghis Khan was a military genius of the very first order, and it may be questioned whether either Caesar or Napoleon can, as commanders, be placed on a par with him. Even the Chinese said he led his armies like a god.

"The manner in which he moved large bodies of men over vast distances, his strategy in unknown regions, always unhesitating, his brilliant victories—a succession of 'suns of Austerlitz' make up a picture of a career to which Europe can offer nothing that will surpass, if indeed she has anything to bear comparison with it."

As to the Mongol pony express, it is described by Marco Polo and others, as in the story. Mark Paul says the express riders made ten days' journey in a single day—probably a hundred and fifty to two hundred miles. In modern times, four Tatars riding day and night used to carry the express from Constantinople to Bagdad, about 1,100 miles in twenty days.

REACHING down into our Camp-Fire cache we draw this 1921 letter. Denmark, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Nebraska, and where is this wandering comrade now?

Omaha, Nebraska.

My only excuse for taking up your time is that I wish to join the boys around the Camp-Fire, and I hope you will let me sit in.

I have been a reader of *Adventure* for years, but until the last year or so I have been too far away to get properly acquainted, yet it seems to me that the correspondence in our magazine is in such a friendly and manly way that I know you won't look on me as an intruder.

I have traveled and seen a little of this world, mostly on the south side of the line; was for some years in Brazil and from 1913 to 1920 in Australia and New Zealand. I have had lost of fun and good friends in most places I have been, but as for my adventures, why, they can pretty nearly be confined in the one word "Work."

I rode range in "Farenda da Vista Alegra" near the city of Valencia, State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; in Australia and New Zealand, however, my work has mostly been in the horticultural line, in which I am enaged at the present time.

I forgot to mention that I was born in Jutland, Denmark, some thirty years ago, but I was so young and small when it happened that I hope nobody will hold that against me.—C. WULFF.

OUR customary biography to give readers a chance to get more fully acquainted with members of our writer's brigade. Kingsley Moses is presented this time.

WHEN he sent us "The Thumb" back in 1924 we knew that he belonged to *Adventure's* brigade in more ways than one. As a writer, of course, but more than that, as a true adventurer. Some of you may remember that first story, and the fact that the crazy negro cook really did fire in the author's face. Perhaps you don't remember that; but if you have read any of the stories he has given us since then you know that the sense of the out-of-doors, the impression of real things seen and done by real men, run through all that Kingsley Moses writes.

He lives by luck. Luck has carried him the world over, has helped him through hard places of all kinds—so he says. After thirty-seven years of it he ought to know. But real luck is something more than blind chance. Energy and ability have something to do with it, as you will conclude when you have scanned Captain Moses' life. Here it is.

He was born in Philadelphia, educated in Pennsylvania and New York. Defective eyesight kept him out of the U. S. Naval Academy, so he went to Dartmouth, where he edited the literary magazine. After his graduation he was master at St. Andrew's School, Concord, Mass., for two years, and after that was Managing Editor of *Town Development Magazine* for two years more.

Just here in steps Old Man Luck—and the adventures begin. In 1917 Kingsley Moses enlisted as private, Regular Army Aviation Section of the Signal Corps. He was sent overseas, saw service in England, France, Italy. In 1919, having attained the rank of Sergeant Major 8th Aviation Instruction Detachment, he was given his honorable discharge, and went wandering.

Austria, the Tyrol, the Adriatic, Africa—Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, the Sahara; Malta. Sounds like a tourists' program? Not at all. Tourists don't guide their footsteps by beacon fires, don't dine on roast iguana, cooked in the open. Still less does a tourist hold down emergency jobs as Acting American Vice-Consul at Naples, or as captain in the Italian Army, or as officer in the Abyssinian Mercenaries.

He voyaged the Mediterranean aboard a Norwegian freighter, the *Maude of Tonsberg* and in the winter of 1920 he turned homeward toward the United States, as quartermaster on the *S. S. Newton*, a cargo boat, John Getsen master, out of Naples for Newport. Luck, his kind of luck, was still pursuing him. The master was shot, the deck crew fell sick, and Kingsley Moses, quartermaster and inexperienced seaman, held the wheel almost continuously for seventy-two hours, heading out past Gibraltar into the Atlantic, where they ran into a blinding foggy sleet storm which lasted five days, and beat home with no coal in the bunkers and two of the crew in irons for attempted murder.

Since then he has settled down to writing. He has written an amazing number of stories and articles in an amazing number of magazines, and has also found time to go on collecting new experiences. He is a graduate of the Fort Sill School of Fire, saw active service with the army during 1923, and received his commission as First Lieutenant in 1926. Three years ago he went to the Azores on the ship *Colombia*, laying transatlantic cables. Two years ago he went to London. He has been at the scene of the earthquake disaster in Fayal, has traveled through numerous mountains in Tennessee and Carolina. Sometimes he lives in Italy, sometimes on the isle of Sicily, again at a New York hotel, gathering experiences, and turning out stuff for the delight and information of his less fortunate brethren.

You'll find his work in other pages than ours. *The Outlook, Collier's, The Forum, The Ladies' Home Journal, The Saturday Evening Post, Youth's Companion, Forbes' Magazine, The London Times Supplement, Industrial Management, Field Artillery Journal*—and of course, *Adventure*. This incomplete list of the periodicals in which his work appears gives an idea of the size of the man's field, of the wide appeal which he has for various types of people.

The list is incomplete because Captain Moses doesn't keep lists, or clippings, or reports of his past performances. He is too busy gathering more material, writing more stories.

And he expects to go on writing them. He likes to swim, he likes to play with artillery, and he likes to wander about the world. With these hobbies to keep him amused, and with luck, he expects to live to be a hundred.

He'll have luck, the luck he always has had, and the rest of us will be just so much the richer for his experiences.

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ARMY

WHY certain German helmets captured during the war bore British regimental mottoes and where the U. S. Army was between 1815 and 1890.

Requests:—"1. When reading old Army and regimental histories it is difficult to follow the movement of troops on a modern atlas. Where can I obtain a garrison chart, U. S. Army, about 1815 to 1890?

2. Some of the captured German helmets have British Regimental mottoes—Peninsular, Waterloo, Gibraltar, Venta del Pozo, Garcia Herñandez, etc. Can you explain the mystery?

3. Who publishes the 'Almanac di Drapeau'?

4. Who are the author and publishers of 'Schools

and Armies in France and Germany?"—HUGH HAMPTON, Linnton, Ore.

Reply, by Lieut. Townsend:—1. I am afraid you will be unable to obtain a map, or a series of maps, which will show the locations of garrisons of the United States Army for the entire period 1815 to 1890. During all of this time the Army was very much on the move and it would require many maps to show even the major changes which took place during the period of westward expansion. Regiments were constantly changing from one section of the country to another, new Army posts were being built and the older ones abandoned. Of course some of the early frontier posts (Fort Snelling for example) are still in use but this is the exception. Another point is that up to the time of the Civil War *good* maps were scarce, even in the Army. For the period following the Civil War I think you can obtain maps which will be of great help to you in your study. I suggest that you write the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C., enclosing one dollar, and ask for all four sheets of a "Map Showing the Limits of the Military Departments and the Positions of the Military Posts of the United States." The first edition of this map was published by the War Department in 1869. A second edition was issued in 1872 and a third in 1874. It is not listed in the catalogue of the Superintendent of Documents but he may be able to obtain a copy for you. Each of the four sheets shows about one-fourth of the area of the United States and should not cost more than twenty-five cents per sheet. If you are unable to obtain a copy from the Superintendent of Documents you might try the War Department direct, quoting the full title as given above in each case. The catalogue of the Superintendent of Documents does list a "Map of the Military Department of the Platte" of which the Nebraska and Wyoming sheets are available at seventeen cents per sheet. The date of this map is 1872.

2. Battle honors of the Peninsular Campaign which appear on the colors and standards of several Hanoverian regiments of the German army and engraved on the helmets of their members recall an exceedingly interesting episode in the history of Europe. These honors were fairly won by German troops in the service of Great Britain in her war against Napoleon. When the French under the direction of Napoleon entered Hanover in 1805 the army of this small German state was disbanded but many of its officers and men took service with the British in what was known as the "King's German Legion." This consisted of regiments of infantry, cavalry, artillery and engineers, in fact a small army of about 25,000 men drawn entirely from the German states and chiefly from Hanover. The "King's German Legion" served in Sweden under Sir John Moore in 1808, in Sicily, in the Peninsular Campaign and elsewhere, not always as a unit, but always as a *corps d'elite*. One of its most famous exploits was the charge of its cavalry regiments at Garcia Hernandez in the Peninsular where the Legion dragoons broke the French infantry squares and are said to have captured 1,400 prisoners. This has been mentioned as one of the great achievements of cavalry in warfare. The Legion remained in the service of the Britsh until after the battle of Waterloo in which it lost heavily. With the reorganization of the Hanoverian army the achievements of the Hanoverian members of the Legion were recognized in the battle honors claimed by several regiments and these honors are still carried by these regiments, now a part of the German army. For a more complete account of this episode see the article "Legion" in late editions of the Encyclopedia Britannica.

3. The "Almanac di Drapeau" is no longer published so far as I have been able to learn. It was published from 1900 to 1909. I do not know the name of the publishers but you can probably obtain copies of the numbers issued from J. E. Steechert & Co., 31 East Tenth Street, New York.

4. I imagine you wish "School and the Army in Germany and France" by Brevet Major General W. B. Hazen, U. S. A., and published by Harper & Bros., in 1872.

I think I have covered all your questions. If I can be of further service to you do not hesitate to write.

EELS

A MYSTERIOUS fish with strange family habits. The gentleman stays at home while the lady wanders abroad for many thousands of miles.

Request:—"My attention has been called to the catching of eels as a means of getting a living.

If reports are favorable would like to locate on Buzzards Bay or Cape Cod in the spring.

In addition to any general information you may give me will you kindly answer the following questions?

Is there always a ready market for them?

At about what price, live weight?

About what returns could be expected through the summer by day or week by a man giving it his whole attention?

How many traps usually handled by one man?

In salt water do the working hours change daily with the tides or can traps be tended or spearing them in the mud be done at either high or low tide?

Is much of this business done in the winter?

Have you any idea what the express charges would be from say Onset to Boston by the hundred-weight?

I am told they run up the rivers and near-by fresh water ponds in large numbers. Can they be legally taken in traps in Massachusetts from these waters?"—JEROME J. SMITH, Oxford, Mass.

Reply, by Mr. Voight:—Taking your specific questions in order:

1. Eels are always in demand and find a market

readily; varying in different localities according to the supply obtained.

2. There is no standard price on eels, it differs in various localities.

3. Eels may be trapped, speared or taken by line in Massachusetts. I do not believe that these fish are protected anywhere.

It would be impossible for me to give you definite information as to the practical side of commercial fishing for eels in any one locality. The price, catch, demand differs in various places. My suggestion would be for you to pick out your location on the Cape and make an arrangement with some of the fish markets in Boston to take your catches.

You might work up some trade with the summer hotels on the Cape. Any location where fresh water enters the ocean and where there is mud and seaweed is ideal for eels.

Less is known about the eel than any other of our food and game fish. They are presumed to breed in the Atlantic southwest of Bermuda. It is claimed that the male eel never leaves the ocean.

The females leave the ocean when about one year old and work up fresh water for thousands of miles. They only go back to salt water to breed in depths of not less that one thousand meters.

No one has ever caught a female eel with eggs.

I am sorry I can not give you more encouragement but I should not advise you to give up present employment for vocation of an eel fisherman, without a personal investigation of supply, demand, prices and shipping facilities of the spot where you intend to locate.

Our Question and Answer service is free but our experts can not reply to queries that are not accompanied by stamped envelope.

BOLIVIA

A HIGH country in which the means of transportation include bateaus, canoe trains, mule trains, llama trains, Indian back packing in addition to the usual railroads and the possible airplanes.

Request:—I am thinking of going down to Santa Cruz, Bolivia, with two partners in 1927, for the purpose of settling down.

Would you kindly send me all information possible concerning the best means of getting there, and also the best way to start on a fairly large scale?

1. What would it cost to get three hundred acres under cultivation during first year?

2. What are means of transportation, and the nearest market?

3. Is it advisable to procure land direct from the government, or private owners?

4. What is the best season to start?

5. Where can necessary implements be procured?

6. If it is necessary to have land surveyed, where can we get the surveyor, and what is approximate cost?

7. As a Canadian citizen, what would one have to do to pass the immigration laws?

8. How long would it take to realize a profit?

9. If there is any further information regarding this project would you kindly state it, as we wish to procure all possible detail." —Horace Dighton and L. Young, Point Colville, Saanichton, Victoria, B. C.

Reply, by Mr. Young:—1. Depends on location 2. Bolivia has no coast-line but is reached by rail from Mollendo, Peru; from Arica; and from Antofagasta. It is also reached by a railroad from Argentine which comes up through Tuchulan, Salta, Jujuy, and La Quiaca and into La Para through Oruro. This latter is the much heralded railroad that has been under construction for many years. The shortest of the rail routes up from the Pacific is the one from Arica. This is 274 miles. The most picturesque from that side is the one from Mollendo to Puno thence to Guaqui by steamer across Lake Titicaca and on to La Paz by rail a total distance of 525 miles. The longest railroad trip from the Pacific is from Antofagasta—719 miles.

It is about 1,700 miles from La Paz to Buenos Aires on the other side, some of which is over the line that has just been completed and the balance over the old established railroads of Argentine Republic. The republic of Bolivia may also be reached from the east by steamers up the Amazon and Madeira Rivers, by rail around the falls of the Madeira, thence to Villa Bella (total from Para 2,152 miles).

There are in addition other headwaters of the Amazon and the headwaters of the Paraguay which are navigated by canoe trains and bateaus. They float down and paddle back. Again in addition there are pack trails over the republic which are frequented by mule teams and llama trains and Indian pack paths over which much backpacking is done. A number of airplane flights have been made in the country. I possess a photo of La Paz taken by airplane. The ore from the mines is brought up both by machinery and also on men's backs.

The highlands of the country is a great mining country. These afford local markets as well as the markets afforded by the larger cities. Anything a man can raise can be sold down the Amazon. The big money crop is cocaine. Most of the leaves are sold to miners for chewing.

3. Depends. You might be able to pick up a plantation cheap. You would have to go and look around.

4. Ho! Hum! The temperature, owing to altitude, varies greatly. The highlands average twelve thousand feet above the sea and the temperature averages around fifty degrees Fahrenheit during the year. The peaks which are ten thousand feet higher look something like Mount Niblock as seen from Lake Louise. The entire part is composed of this highland plateau, studded with peaks. It's good sheep country, as the llama, guanaco, alpaca, and

vicuña (four giant sheep of the Incas), are indigenous. In the east it slopes off to the northeast into heavy tropical jungle, humid, hot, and unhealthy; and to the southeast into flat, grass-studded plains. On these eastern plains you may find any sort of land you wish and any sort of climate—take yonr pick.

Roses bloom and strawberries may be eaten any day in the year at Cochabamba. Santa Cruz de la Sierra has a fine climate. The temperature of this eastern slope ranges from the coolth of the highlands up to 97 degrees Fahrenheit in the lowlands on the eastern fringe. The rainy season lasts from December to May and the dry season occupies the other months. It does not rain all the time during the rainy season but only half the time. It is not so bad as our winters or yours up there in Canada where I spent four winters myself.

5. Native implements may be purchased in La Paz and other places. These are primitive axes, cutlasses, etc. You would possibly do better to take American or English implements so far as plows, etc., are concerned. If you go as a settler you will be able to get these in free.

6. Government land is surveyed by a government engineer. Following are excerpts from the land laws of Bolivia:

"All vacant lands belong to the nation and can be acquired by purchase or otherwise subject to special regulations. A hectare (2.47 acres) of land is the unit of measure. Any one may acquire as many as 20,000 hectares, paying cash at the rate of ten cents per hectare for farming and grazing land; and if the land contains any rubber trees the price is one *boliviano* (forty cents U. S.) per hectare. *The purchaser must settle at least one family on every thousand hectares;* any request for more than 20,000 hectares must be made to Congress. When the land is given the land must be measured and properly located by a Government expert and the expenses incurred must be borne by the purchaser. The Government reserves some of the vacant lands for adjudication to immigrants, the lands being granted only by act of Congress. In no case can public lands be claimed which are not actually occupied.

"Any alien not over sixty years of age, upon proof of good moral character, desiring to establish himself in Bolivia will be granted the following privileges: The right to come into the country and be transported to the place of destination over the highways or railroads of the country. The right extends to his wife and children; the free transportation of his baggage; the right to occupy public lands for agricultural purposes, stock raising, or any other useful industry.

"Each immigrant can obtain fifty hectares (123 acres), the value of which is fixed at ten cents per hectare. Children over 14 years of age can secure twenty-five hectares extra. The immigrant may have the option of paying for this land in cash or in five-year instalments. In the latter case five per cent. annually will be charged for the value of the land. The immigrant may freely select the land desired in the designated zone. Children over 18 years of age have the right to acquire separate land. No immigrant may possess more than three lots or sections by purchase or other means. In case of purchase on time the immigrant can not alienate nor mortgage the property, the Government having first lien on the land."

7. See above.

8. Goodness knows.

9. Bolivia has an area of 500,000 square miles and a population of 2,000,000, mainly Quichua Indians, Spanish meztizos, foreign miners and wild jungle Indians. The language is Spanish although much Quichua is spoken in the highlands. The principal exports are tin, rubber, wolfram, silver, copper ore, bismuth, lead, wool, hides and skins. Most of the *cocoa* is used locally. The principal imports are clothing and textiles, flour, coal, sugar, machinery, arms and ammunition.

Be sure to enclose postage with your inquiry.

COINS

ONE theory to account for the rarity of a silver dollar of a certain date. Think of a coin's being issued thirty-six years after the date it bears.

Request:—"Will you please explain why there are only two 1804 United States silver dollars in the world? Where can I buy some good books about coins? Does the U. S. Mint issue any free reading matter on coins?"—ALBERT L. WESSNER, Lebanon, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—About the 1804 dollar, I think there are from 12 to 18 known. My own theory, held by many others as well, is that none of these was struck in 1804 but they were struck around 1840 when the agitation was on to resume the coinage of silver dollars. The fact remains that none was known until about this date and the Government had dies for these. A few specimens were struck in the '70s.

The 1804 dollar is more heralded in the newspapers than anywhere else, as it makes good reading matter.

There are thousands of books on coins, most of them expensive. You can, however, get a number of fairly good text-books on U. S. coins at varying prices from Guttag Brothers, 18 Exchange Place, New York City.

On the enclosed list you will find the names of various dealers; many of these have books for sale. We do not have any books for sale especially applicable to the beginner. The U. S. Mint does not issue any free book. A while ago they did sell a catalogue of the Mint collection, which is very full of interesting material. It can be purchased from the Bureau of Printing, Washington, D. C.

TEXAS RANGERS

EACH state had its own method of selecting the men who are to serve as its police. The method employed by Texas is given in part below. Who will say that it does not get results?

Request—"Will you please give me some information about the State Police of Texas or the Texas Rangers, as they are called?

What are the requirements for enlistment as for age and qualifications?

To whom should I apply for enlistment application blank?"—LEON POORE, Moran, Wyo.

Reply, by Mr. Bent:—I am sorry, but it would do no good to give you full information concerning the Texas Rangers. They allow no one to join who is not a resident of Texas. Border patrol and police experience are both requirements.

A man should be twenty-three before he applies for enlistment.

The Texas Rangers are a pretty well hand-picked lot of men. There are no examinations such as for other State forces which are organized on military lines.

HOMESTEADING IN THE MARITIMES

BELOW is the introductory portion of a monograph prepared by Mr. Fred Bowden on homesteading in the provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. The complete monograph, which is about seven times as long as this excerpt, may be obtained by applying to Mr. Bowden direct. His address will be found among the list of experts in the next issue.

The object of this monograph is to cover the homesteading situation, and also to give some of the outstanding characteristics of the three eastern Canadian provinces covered by the writer, for this department, namely: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

NEW BRUNSWICK

The above province to my mind is by far the most interesting of the Maritimes from the homesteaders' point of view. I might add that it is the last place in the eastern part of the North American continent which I know of, that offers real advantages to the prospective homesteader.

One of the outstanding features of homesteading in this province is that a man DOES NOT HAVE TO BE A BRITISH SUBJECT TO APPLY FOR A LOT OR CROWN LANDS IN NEW BRUNSWICK. The handling of the Crown lands (from which all homestead grants are made) is vested in the Department of Lands and Mines, Fredricton, New Brunswick, full supplementary information to this monograph may be obtained by addressing Hon. G. H. Prince, Deputy Minister of Lands and Mines at the above department. In writing him you may mention the writer's name if you wish, but this is not necessary. My experience with this department has shown me that the homesteader may expect and receive every help and assistance to which he is entitled, and in many instances more. New Brunswick is anxious to secure citizens of the homesteader type.

HOMESTEADING rights are granted under the *Labour* and Settlement Act, and the provisions of this act are briefly as follows:

A man need not be a British subject to apply for and receive a grant of land in this province under the terms of this act. No man can apply for or receive a grant of more than 100 acres. No timber to be cut on the granted lands, except for the necessary clearing of the land, or for building purposes, until the title passes to the applicant, at the expiration of three years. Actual residence on the lot applied for, for three years or more, the erection of a house not less than 16 x 20 feet in size, and the cultivation of ten acres of the grant land, and the performance of $30.00 worth of road work. The last-named regulation however may be commuted by the payment of $20.00 in cash in lieu of labor. When all of the above requirements have been met to the satisfaction of the department the title or grant passes to the applicant.

Applicants for homesteading of Crown lands from outside the province are always advised by the department to take up a lot in the Blue Bell Tract, and I personally would advise the same, especially if a man were intending to make straight farming his business. If, of course, a man wished to supplement his farming operations with fishing and lumbering, I believe there are other localities better suited for this than the above tract.

Regulations governing the disposal of lands in this tract are practically the same as those of the *Labour* and Settlement Act, excepting that the applicant is not required to perform labor on the roads, as called for in the above act.

He must also pay $1.00 per acre for his lot, payable in instalments of $25.00 each, the first payment to be made when application is filed.

The settlement is situated in the county of Victoria on the line of the Transcontinental Railway, about midway between the towns of Grand Falls and Plaster Rock. There is at the present time extensive water power developments being projected in the first named town where power developed will furnish the whole of New Brunswick and northern Maine with cheap electric power. Grand Falls of the Saint John river are a miniature Niagara. The soil of the Blue Bell Tract is considered excellent for farming, located in the Saint John river valley, and adjacent to the famous potato

growing lands of Aroostook County, Maine. These lands are very easy of access, near the Danish settlement of New Brunswick, and not far from the Scotch settlements of Stonehaven and Kintore.

Besides the above tract there are Crown lands open for settlement to homesteaders in the following counties of the province, Restigouche, Gloucester, Northumberland, Kent, Queens, Victoria, and Madawaska. The best land is probably in the first three and the last two named. All of the above counties with the exception of Victoria and Northumberland are largely French speaking. If a man wished to go in for fishing and lumbering in addition to farming my advice would be to locate in Northumberland, Restigouche, or Gloucester counties, but if he will state his requirements to the Department of Lands and Mines he will be located in the place best suited to his needs, as the Provincial government is just as anxious to see him succeed as he himself. I have in mind a number of homesteaders from the British Isles who are doing mighty well farming and fishing in Northumberland County. These men settled after the Armistice, under the Soldiers' Settlement Act.

"I HAVE personally discussed his wide knowledge, character and ability with authorities, curators, etc., in London, Paris, Brussels, Rome, Yokohoma, and without exception they rate him the best general numismatist in the world," writes a friend of the magazine, himself a student of coins and medals, concerning Mr. Howland Wood, our new expert, whose answer to a reader in this issue is his first to be published. Mr. Wood's position as curator of the museum of the American Numismatic Society would alone be guarantee of his ability to give service on this subject that is as nearly perfect as possible. We need more A. A. experts like him to cover such outdoor activities as are not listed below and such geographical sections as are not listed in the next issue. For further particulars address JOSEPH COX, care *Adventure*.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

The full list of experts will appear in the next issue. Besides geographical sections covering practically all of the world they handle the following topics: Salt and Fresh Water Fishing, Small Boating, Canoeing, Yachting, Motor Boating, Motor Camping, Motor Vehicles, All Shotguns, All Rifles, Edged Weapons, Firearms, Archery, First Aid on the Trail, Health Building Outdoors, Hiking, Camp Cooking, Mining and Prospecting, Forestry in the United States, Tropical Forestry, Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada, Aviation, Army Matters, Navy Matters, State Police, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Horses, Dogs, Photography, Linguistics and Ethnology, American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal, Herpetology, Entomology, Ornithology, Taxidermy, Stamps, Coins and Medals, Radio, Track, Tennis, Basketball, Bicycling, Swimming, Skating, Skiing and Snow-shoeing, Hockey, Boxing.

Camp-Fire Buttons—To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only sequisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Butterick Publishing Company, *not* to any individual.

Forwarding Mail—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Identification Cards—Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Butterick Publishing Company, *not* to any individual.

Old Songs that Men Have Sung.—This department for collecting and discussing songs that still live among the people is printed in alternate issues.

Adventure's Travel Association.—Temporarily this department will appear only in alternate issues.

A News Bulletin *of Outdoor Equipment and Commodities*

STRAIGHT GOODS

TESTED BY OUR EXPERTS

WHEN the newspapers tell us of a famous expedition off to hunt big game in the jungle, or when a fortunate friend departs to the North Woods for the hunting season, all of us who are chained to desks and duty should be privileged at least to utter three rousing jeers to stifle our envy. However, most of us can do more than mope at home and hope the big-game hunters choke on venison. No matter where we live there are sure to be some hunting possibilities. Rabbits, quail, wild ducks and much other small game abound in districts that are easily reached from almost any community in the United States, and hunting them requires little effort and no expensive equipment.

Donegan Wiggins, "Ask Adventure" expert on firearms, has been testing rifles and pistols for "Straight Goods" and gives here his report on three more articles. Last month he discussed the rifles and ammunition listed at the end of this report and says that any one of these will give good service both for hunting and target practise.

REPORTS OF TEST

NEW STEVENS SHOTGUN PISTOL, 410 GAUGE—Stevens Arms Company, Chicopee Falls, Mass. The new Stevens Offhand 410 pistol, using the conventional shot shell of that caliber, is one especially desirable for small game at close ranges.

The pistol is of the conventional Stevens tip-up action; barrel is round and 12¼ inches in length; grip is walnut; and a bead foresight is attached.

There is really a choke to the barrel, and tests at varying ranges indicate that the effective range on such game as rabbits is about thirty yards or so in open shooting. These tests were made with shot of No. 5 and No. 7½ sizes. A shot was made at seventy-five yards that buried the No. 5 twice its own diameter in seasoned fir wood. This shot, while showing the power of the little gun, was an unusually fortunate chance and proves little as to a hit at that distance, due to the open pattern. Say twenty-five yards as the extreme range, and you'll be safe.

With round ball cartridges, the gun will prove of some use against the larger game. I'd not hesitate to fire on a deer at close range, say fifteen yards, with the combination. For a pot-meat weapon, I should far prefer this pistol to the .22 hand guns so generally used as companions to the big game rifles. For the use of women, to whom the revolver and automatic are unknown quantities, this gun with its scattering charge is very efficient.

It is officially approved.—DONEGAN WIGGINS.

NEW WEBLEY AIR PISTOLS—Webley, Scott Ltd., Weamon Street, Birmingham, England.

This air pistol has been inspected, tested and found to be all that is claimed for it.

I tested two models; the older one which uses leather washers for the retention of the compressed air of the charge; and the new, better and slightly more expensive one which, to provide perfect compression, has rings accurately fitted and placed in grooves on the surface of the piston just like the pistons of a car engine.

The sights of the pistol are finely made, and adjustable for both elevation and windage. This effect is secured by locking screws, and the adjustment is very fine indeed. The trigger-pull is capable of adjustment by a screw to the point of pull desired by the user of the pistol. While the one I used seemed to be a trifle heavy, I nevertheless placed eight out of ten shots in the ten ring of the indoor target at ten yards.

The barrel is finely rifled, is gas-tight, and uses a waisted, or hourglass-shaped, bullet of lead, hollow-based and capable of excellent shooting. The grip is designed to conform to that of the average automatic pistol, and is comfortable to one used to that weapon, although it may seem a bit unfamiliar to those who are accustomed to revolvers.

For target practise indoors or out, especially at restricted ranges; where expense is an item to be avoided; where small game is to be secured without disturbance; I can not imagine a better device than the Webley air pistol. And its quality is up to the standard of Webley revolvers and guns.

It is officially approved.—DONEGAN WIGGINS.

Other articles approved by "Straight Goods:"

New .22 Winchester Rifle, Model 56.
Winchester Repeating Arms Company, New Haven, Conn.
Crosman Air Rifle.
Crosman Arms Company, 500 St. Paul Street, Rochester, New York.
UMC Rustless Cartridges.
Remington Arms Company, 25 Broadway, New York City.

Lost Trails

We offer this service free of charge to readers who wish to get in touch with old friends from whom the years have separated them. All inquiries of this sort received by us, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with the inquirer's name. We reserve the right, in case the inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any number or other name, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and in general to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. For the benefit of the friend you seek, give your own name when possible. Give also your own full address. We will forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal Star *to give additional publicity in their "Missing Relative Column" weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred. Full lists of those unfound are reprinted semiannually.*

POLLEY, JAMES. Formerly of Los Angeles, Calif., and Yucatan, Mexico. Communicate with William (Bill) Fried.—Address 120 W. 28 St., Bayonne, New Jersey.

CHALK, JOE. Last heard from in Esquintla, Guatemala. Write your old pal—TOM MULLEN, 418 Preston Street, Ottawa, Ontario.

DAVIS, BRYAN. Mother very ill. Come home or communicate with family immediately. All are greatly worried and anxious. Money matters cleared up. Kiddies want you.—Address MRS. BRYAN DAVIS, 114 N. Central Ave., Canonsburg, Pa.

ROBINSON, J. P. (SCOTTY). Write at once. Important.—Address BILL CHANEY, 1058 Ellis Street, San Francisco, Calif.

BALDWIN, ALFRED. Last heard of in London, Ontario, in 1919. Any information will be greatly appreciated by his son, who has good news for him.—Address E. A. BALDWIN, 2 Bank St., Lithgow, N. S. W., Australia.

PARSONS, HARRY. Please send address where we can reach you by mail. Anxious.—Address care of Arcade Sta. JOE.

RILEY, JOHN H. Formerly of St. John's and Louisville, Ky. Last heard of was with Johnnie Jones Carnival Co. Any one knowing his whereabouts please advise LOUIE READ—care of *Adventure*.

PADGETT, JENNINGS A. Last heard from in 'Frisco, July, 1923. Information will be appreciated.—Address G. H. PAXTON, 520 S. Loomis St., Chicago, Ill.

SANCHE, HUBERT. Last heard from was in Good Samaritan Hospital, Portland, Oregon. Information will be appreciated.—Address C. H. PAXTON, 520 S. Loomis Street, Chicago, Ill.

WOULD like to hear from any one who has been with the 9th U. S. Engineers, M. T. D., Fort Sam Houston, Texas.—Address MAX CAYS, U. S. Vet. Hospital (102), Livermore, Calif.

DADDY. Buskie asks me to write and tell Daddy to hurry home to him and little brother.—B. and F. (M. A. W.)

WRIGHT, LEONA (née Leona Frye). Mother is most anxious to hear from her. Would appreciate information.—TALMAGE E. DAWSON, Bismarck, North Dakota.

KUCERA, ADOLPH. Father dead. Please communicate with your sister.—ANNA S. KUCERA, 673 Johnson Street, Portland, Oregon.

Be sure to let us know when you have found the friend or relative for whom you are inquiring.

BOHEM, CHARLES. Formerly manager of Wagner Market Co., at 155 Bloomfield Ave., Newark, N. J. His brother in Australia is anxious to hear from him, if he is still alive.—Address F. BOHEM, Kalbo, via Innisfail, North Queensland, Australia.

HALL, ALONZO FISCHER. Parents reside in Daytona Beach and are in great need of him at present. Small scar over bridge of nose. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please communicate with N. C. LONGEE, Box 777, Ocala, Florida.

S. D. C. Please send your address to me at McCure, so I can write to you. My last letters to you were returned. —CAROL.

Be sure to let us know when you have found the friend or relative for whom you are inquiring.

GUTTMON, MRS. HARRY (Ada Davies). If you read this please write to your sister Lena or Dad. We are anxious and worried and want to hear from you. Any one knowing her whereabouts please write to MRS. LENA PERKINS, 32 Matilda Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

WOULD like to get in touch with some of the old timers who were in or around Abilene and Fort Hays, Kansas, back in the time when "Wild Bill" Hickok was in that country. My father was there from '69 to '76. Also those who belonged to the "Dismal Six."—Write H. E. WARREN, 236 Penna Avenue, Aurora, Ill.

CASEY, DAN R. Please let us hear from you. Francis is sick.—JANE, General Delivery, Yakima, Wash.

DAVIS, JAMES. Please write to Esther, 11 West 106th St., 4 W. Same city.

BRUNS, LILLIAN D. Left New York early in August, 1926, for travel in Kentucky and Ohio. Her daughter wishes to ascertain her whereabouts.—Address D. J. MINNEMEYER, Sans Souci, Georgian Bay, Ontario, Canada.

LE BLANC (or White) PIERRE (Peter), JOSEPH OR JEAN (John), three bachelor brothers who operated a mill in Mississippi City in the '80's. Any particulars regarding their late place of residence requested by their nephew, GILBERT LE BLANC, care of P. O. Box 217, Souris, P. E. I., Canada.

THE following have been inquired for in either the November 23rd, 1926 or the December 23rd, 1926 issues of Adventure. They can get the names and addresses of the inquirer from this magazine.

BERKOWITZ, MEYER; Brown, Ben or Big Ben; Butterworth, Robert H.; Carney, Vincent; Connelly, John; Daniels, Conley or Conn; Dettmerhing, Earnest; "Ed Boy" (Ed Norton); Evans, Llewellyn; Faldowski, Edward; Fairbairn, John Goodbourn; Farr, William Goebel; Fester, Glenn; Gayle, Lowell; George Mc (McIsaac); Gordon or Gardner, S. H.; Hays, Elijah H.; Jack, Lewis N.; Jamison, Hill; Jones, Frank; Langhaar, Jack; Langshaw, Robert Henry; Mongeau, Lawrence; Moore, Henry J.; O'Brien, Claude Francis; Orlander, Sven. "A. B."; Peck, Lewis M.; Pippin, Lee; Polley, James J.; Rider, Stanley F.; Ring, Albert; Ring, Isabelle R.; River, Fred.; Rosenberg, Leo; Ross, Louis L; Si. R. V. J.; Smithett or Roderman, William Melvine; Stapler, John R.; Stutts, William Allen; Sullivan, John; Texas Roads; Traversy, A. J. (Bert); Van Houten, Lynn C.; Williams, James; Windross, Raymond H.

UNCLAIMED Mail—Michael Lekki; Howard Shannon.

Verdicts by Adventure *as to the authoritativeness, reliability and authenticity of fact-material, local color and general soundness of current non-fiction*

BOOKS *you can* Believe

Given by Experts having first-hand Knowledge of the Material involved

THIS department offers a unique service. Dealing with only non-fiction books, it passes solely on the reliability of the fact-material contained therein, answering the question "Is this book authoritative, trustworthy and of importance?" Brief judgment is passed by our staff of over one hundred specialists, each an expert in his particular field. Only books dealing with the field of outdoor activities are considered, but that field ranges all the way from fishing to entomology, from travel to anthropology. While reviewing new books as issued, the department will also take up older books that are worth while. (Note that most of our "Ask Adventure" experts have compiled careful bibliographies on their respective fields, sent free to readers if stamped and addressed return envelope is enclosed.)

BEYOND THE BOSPHORUS, by Lady Dorothy Mills. Little, Brown and Co.—A young Englishwoman leaves London with empty pockets, for a ramble through the Turkish interior, Syria, the Holy Land, Transjoedania, and Iraq. She visits Angora, Mustapha Kemal's capital; Aleppo; Damascus; Beyrout; Jerusalem. She crosses the desert to Mosul. Her book is a good guide for would-be travelers, going into feminine detail as to food, hotels, climate, red-tape encountered, manners and customs. It is the first book of its sort I have seen written since the recent great changes in the Near East.—J. F. EDWARDS.

THE GREAT ISLAND, by Don C. Seitz. The Century Company.—Mr. Seitz has written a most bright, lucid and interesting history of Newfoundland from within, and in the main his book is authentic and up to the mark. Apart from several geographical and chronological inaccuracies it may be taken that Mr. Seitz has "sailed over," even though superficially, the ground which he has covered. Newfoundlanders know that Cabot in the *Matthew* did not make the Atlantic run from Bristowe in twenty-five days, and that May 27 is not St. John the Baptist's festival.—C. T. JAMES.

THE FIRE OF DESERT FOLK, by Ferdinand Ossendowski. Dutton.—To any one interested in Morocco there is not an uninteresting page. The author made a long journey in Al-Moghreb, observed keenly, relates his impressions without attempting to make them either post-mortem or propaganda. For a man whose journey was chaperoned by French officials, Mr. Ossendowski remained remarkably free of the French colonial theory of the divine right of conquest so long as the *conquistador* is convinced of his own moral superiority over the conquered. One may take exception to his contention that Sid Abd-el-Kerim was merely a tool of Bolshevik Russia, and to his occasional lapses into something of a haze beneath the quaintly hypnotic influence of some French official; but it's a worthwhile, scholarly volume. It is too bad that the glossary at the end of the volume is undependable. For example, "Aissa" is given as meaning "Jesus Christ," whereas it really means only "Jesus"—a common name among Moors and Spanish, with no religious significance. "Aissawa" is explained as "Followers of Jesus" (Christ?) whereas they take their name from their patron saint, Mohamed ben Aissa, who lived some two centuries ago.—GEORGE E. HOLT.

EAST OF SIAM, by Harry A. Franck. Century.—This book is entertaining and full of real information. If it might be possible to write a guide book and remove the oppressive element of the guide this book would be it. One travels right along with Franck, side by side with him. A traveler wishing to visit the French colonies and protectorates of the Far East might read this book, learn exactly where to go, what to look at, and whom to meet.—GORDON MACCREAGH.

ON THE MANDARIN ROAD, by Roland Dorgeles. Century.—Too many writers about China permit themselves to be carried away by romance, or else they are unable to see anything but the poverty and the sordid side of things. M. Dorgeles has the gift of seeing enough of the romance to make his books entertaining and at the same time enough fact to make them accurate.—G. W. TWOMEY.

The Trail *Ahead*

The next issue of ADVENTURE, *out February 1st*

A *Complete Novelette*

Salt

By Arthur O. Friel

"You will bring my daughter to me?" pleaded *Esteban Pardo.* And being the man he was, *Sixto Scott* conveyed city-bred *Maraquita* up the river to the grassy country where common salt is a precious commodity and wild riders make their own law.

A true tale of *Adventurous Youth*

The Boy John Jewitt

By Agnes C. Laut

Out from the port of Hull sailed the youngster *John Jewitt,* sick of old England, longing for romance. At Nootka Island he found his adventure and furnished America with one of the most picturesque events in her early history.

Two Serials *of America*

Part Three of Painted Ponies

By Alan LeMay

Part Four of The Fighting Years

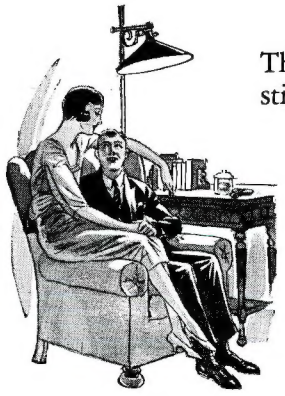
By Hugh Pendexter

And—*Good Short Stories*

The Covenant of the Craddocks, by Albert Richard Wetjen, *the young captain held to his father's code;* MacGinty's Brother, *an Irishman in a strange land,* by W. Townend; Sunset, *when the temple bell sounded,* by Sidney Herschel Small; Air-Sized, by A. A. Caffrey, *death and life in a tiny cock-pit;* Come You Home a Hero, by Edward Shenton, *there was glory at the front.*

Adventure is out on the 1st and 15th of each month

The Smile That Won



Jim Barnes looked at his wife with admiration. They had been married more than a year, but he still loved her as much as he did the day he met her.

"You know, dear," he said, as he settled in his easy chair for a quiet evening at home, "I have always wondered why you picked me of all the many men you knew. Do you mind telling me the reason?"

"Of course not," she replied. "Do you remember the day you came to the door trying to sell me DELINEATOR?"

"Sure, I remember. I had pulled many doorbells that day and I was pretty tired and grouchy."

"Well, you may have been, but you had a broad smile on your face. That smile made me subscribe to the magazine and it made me fall in love with you!"

"That certainly is fine," Jim said. "So I can thank DELINEATOR for my wife."

"You surely can," she smiled, "and we both can thank DELINEATOR for the many nice things we bought for this home of ours."

"Yes, that's right, and just for that we'll both go out and sell DELINEATOR in our spare time hereafter. It's great what a difference these extra dollars make."

* * *

You'd be surprized how many people owe their comfort and happiness to DELINEATOR, just like Jim Barnes and his wife.

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